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Confessions
of a
Too-Generous Young Lady.



Confessions
of a
Too-Generous Young Lady.

with
A LATER CONTINUATION.



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CONFESSIONS
OF A
TOO-GENEROUS YOUNG LADY.

CHAPTER I.

"CONFESSIONS of a *too-generous* young lady!" my fair readers repeat scornfully: "why the author ought to be ashamed of herself, praising herself, even on the title-page, in that style! I'm sure the book's good-for-nothing, trashy, conceited!"

Wait a minute, amiable ladies, and recollect, if you please—you see I'm disposed to be polite, if you are..... but never

mind, only recollect that people don't *confess* their virtues, but their sins and weaknesses, and therefore to exhibit these same weaknesses before your eyes, is not a proof of conceit. Indeed, I have had ample reason to regard this inconvenient softness and over-benevolence, this absence of firmness and forbiddingness in my character as being very far from meritorious. Have I not been wheedled and coaxed out of my most delicate gloves, my most valuable trinkets, out of ball and concert tickets, out of best places everywhere, and best chances altogether? have I not lost a friend, lost a fortune, lost a lover? and ought I to die and make no confession? I'm not particularly partial to telling my faults, I assure you: I don't care about doing it now, only, as I've very recently renounced all the frivolities as well as

privileges of girlhood, and as I begin to feel myself belonging to a new phase of life, I look upon my past sins as belonging to a more imperfect stage of existence, which cannot shadow with disgrace my new state.

You must know, then, that I'm the eldest, and I may say the handsomest—I'm on my candour, remember—of three sisters. Our dear father and mother resided, and still reside, in a city in the north of England, commercially speaking, almost as busy as London, and where public amusements are by no means scarce; but we were sent to school at a quieter, airier town, some twenty miles distant, where our grandmother dwelt.

Well, upon my twelfth birthday—it isn't worth while to go further back than that, I think—papa and mamma gave a juvenile

ball, it being holiday time, luckily, and we girls were to be all dressed alike, in white muslin with broad pink sashes, except that, as queen of the *fête*, I was to be distinguished by a wreath of flowers; wheat-bine and corn poppies had been selected as being most suitable to such a wild little thing as I, I suppose; and after I was dressed, I was just placing it on my head and smiling as I saw how nicely the scarlet poppies contrasted with my black curls, when my sister Ellen, who was a year younger, approached the mirror.

“ Oh, Nelly, look ! ” I exclaimed ; “ isn’t it a beauty of a wreath ? ”

To my surprise, Ellen, instead of joining in my admiration, burst out crying. In a minute I forgot my pretty flower-crown, and throwing my arms round her neck, begged to know what was the matter. She

could not speak for a moment or two; then she murmured, sobbingly, "The wreath, the wreath! how I wish I had one!"

"Oh! if that's all," said I, "you shall have mine, only dry your eyes and smile again."

And she did smile in a trice, she took me at my word, without the least scruple—took my wreath from my shining locks and placed it on her own red hair, and ran off triumphant. I went and gathered two lovely white rosebuds in the garden, fastened them amidst my curls, and then followed her to the ball-room. When I went in, papa said, with a sly twinkle of his eye—

"Well, where's your crown, Esther? you can't be a crownless queen, you know."

"Nelly wanted it, so I let her have it," I replied.

“ You set very little store on my gifts, I see,” said papa, “ and therefore to punish you, Nelly shall be our queen to-night.”

I thought this very cruel of papa; but my attention was now diverted to Nelly, who, very proud of having deposed me, came forward smiling her best; but the red poppies and the red hair looked so very ridiculous in juxtaposition, and Nelly's vanity was so absurdly conspicuous, that everybody greeted the new sovereign with a burst of laughter, which dreadfully abashed her. Then the young gentleman, who had been appointed to open the ball with the queen, was firm in his allegiance to me, in fact the queen had to look about in vain for a partner: and soon the boys whispered ill-natured things to one another about poppies and carrots, mermaids with their coral crowns, and old Mother Redcap, till

Nelly, who heard a good deal, was half wild with vexation.

In the meanwhile, I and little Lilian were enjoying ourselves mightily, dancing away to our hearts' content, and being plentifully supplied with sweetmeats and sweet beverages by our gallant beaux in the brief intervals of rest.

After awhile, a good-natured boy, but awkward withal, and afflicted as well with the fiery curse of flamingly red locks, taking pity on poor Nelly and feeling a lively sympathy for her in her plight, led her out to dance. People looked grave that they might not laugh, for Rufus had a most fantastic way of exhibiting his dancing pumps, and this night he outdid himself in dexterity. At length, either by accident or on purpose, the poppy crown received a brush from a tall boy's elbow that sent it

all awry. Most zealously Rufus attempted to set it right, but while engaged in this laudable endeavour, his glove got caught in an outsticking piece of wire; in vain he pulled and snatched, his hand remained attached to the glowing crown. A low murmur of laughter broke out; Nelly scolded, her partner grew redder and redder, and more and more confused, till in an agony of desperation he gave such a hard tug with his entangled hand that the wreath came away with it.

Luckily papa came up and prevented any violent outbreak on Nelly's part; he took the wreath and put it away, saying it was more trouble than it was worth. However, as soon as the company were gone, Nelly began to reproach me, declaring she was sure I let her have the wreath on purpose to make her ridiculous.

"Observe, Esther," said my father, "that you get no credit for your ill-advised generosity; reflect in future whether a request is reasonable before you grant it. As for you, Nelly, your wish was a selfish one, and you have been rightly punished by its gratification having made you ridiculous. And now to blame your sister for the fruits of your own vanity is ungrateful as well as unjust!"

Among my school-companions was a girl named Agatha Lawne, the daughter of a solicitor residing at Whitebridge, where our seminary was. When I returned to school after the Midsummer holidays, none of the pupils greeted me with such evident pleasure and affection as Agatha; indeed, we had always been good friends, but now we became sisters in love, inseparable during the hours of recreation.

With my parents' approbation I often spent the half-holidays, whenever grandmamma did not insist upon my going to see her, with the Lawnes, *i.e.*, Mr. and Mrs. Lawne and my sweet little friend; they had no other child—and there I met a cousin of Agatha's, a fine handsome youth of seventeen, to whom Agatha, who was two years older than myself, seemed very partial. He did not appear to return the preference, but paid me, child as I was, a vast deal more respect and attention. Agatha took it all in good part, laughed at us, jested about us unmercifully, and seemed fonder of me than ever.

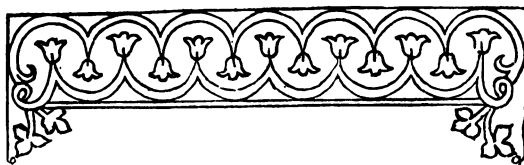
And soon I became quite sorry when grandmamma's invitations came, not that I had ceased to love dear, kind grandmamma, or she to love and make much of me—indeed, everybody made much of me at her

house, I was regularly spoilt there—but I was not quite happy, I longed for a little laughter and noise, and couldn't help feeling dull even though my favourite cakes were always present in profusion at tea; though I always had a glass of syllabub before leaving; though grandmamma invariably had a sweet present for me—a dozen of kid gloves of my own little size and of the most delicate hues, or a few pairs of white silk stockings, or tiny white satin slippers to dance in, or half-a-dozen of fine French cambric handkerchiefs, or such a tasteful little pink or primrose-coloured bonnet; and though grandmamma, when it grew dusk within doors and the stars came slowly and sadly to peep upon the earth, often began to talk with a solemnity and mysteriousness that filled my mind with a sort of dread delight, of the night

that knows no dreams, and of the dawn whose heaven-path no cloud shall dim, no sunset follow; and though she would then declare, with her sweet, mournful smile, that when she slept beneath the still shadows of that night, I should find myself rich, very rich, her sole heiress; and though, when grandmamma had fairly set me crying at the idea of her being laid in the cold, damp ground all alone, she would kiss away my tears, and pet me and caress me so remorsefully, and hold countless smelling-bottles one after another to my nose for the next half-hour—yet—yet I could not help longing that she would invite Algeron Lawne and my favourite Agatha.

But however much I longed, I dared not for worlds have proposed it, for grandmamma liked to be very quiet and have none but quiet guests, and the very sound

of the glad laughing voices of my young friends would have broken sacrilegiously the hush of her cloister-like rooms. One apartment, I remember—and it was a much-loved resting-place of hers—had been fitted up something in the style of a chapel, and was shrouded in shadow until the sunset glow, purpled by the stained glass of the Gothic window, richly but subduedly illumined it. At that hour grandmamma would often wake the full, deep harmonies of her grand piano, which stood in a recess between two marble pillars, and would fill the vaulted chamber with the pealing notes of some wild, sad requiem or majestic symphony; the bright eve sinking thus on the wings of music to the lull of the holy night.



CHAPTER II.

Years passed; my last school-term was ended. I had formed many friendships, but none of so intimate a character as that with Agatha; and I was spending my last hours at Whitebridge with the Lawnes, who gave a quadrille party the evening before I left for home.

I was in my seventeenth year; quite of an age to delight in such a gathering, and was enjoying myself superlatively, being in an excellent humour not only with myself, but with every one present. Perhaps a

lovely new silk which dear grandmamma had given me for the occasion (it was a silvery gray trimmed with pink, and I had pink roses in my hair to match), perhaps the devotion of young Mr. Lawne, beyond dispute the handsomest, the most *distingué*, the most eligible young man there, contributed to my happy frame of mind; it was certainly not Agatha's lovingness that occasioned it, for, for the first time she exhibited an unevenness of temper that would have grieved me had I not been in an extraordinarily exultant mood—had I not guessed that she was envious of me!

Well, I had finished my second quadrille with Algernon, and was promenading with him round the room, when a servant appeared in the open door-way, as I was about to pass, showed me a letter, and beckoned me out. I recognized my grand-

mother's favourite waiting-maid, and rather hastily in my sensation of annoyance, drew my arm from Mr. Lawne's and quitted the apartment.

Algernon, who had seen the signal, followed me into the hall; and Agatha, who had seen us both, I suppose, go out, could not have been long ere she did the same.

Unconscious of the presence of either, I stood leaning against a pillar perusing my note; the lamplight from a central argand fell full on my face, and must, to a keen observer, have betrayed the acute disappointment that, I'm sure, for a moment was written on my countenance. It was *but a moment*, however; I shook off the unworthy feeling of discontent I experienced, and, turning to the servant, said—"I will go immediately—as soon as I have changed my dress."

"Where are you going, Esther? nothing is the matter, I hope?" asked Algernon, anxiously.

"Oh, no! I believe not; I'm only going to grandmamma's; she wants to see me particularly," I replied, a little startled to find him near me.

"But," interposed Agatha, "you will not, cannot leave us to-night! the party was got up in honour of you and Algernon; pray send an excuse! the old lady," she whisperingly continued, "is unreasonable in requiring your services to-night, as she was aware I dare say, of how much felicity you expected. I will send away the servant for you, with all sorts of kind messages and clever excuses. Pray go back to the drawing-room, or you'll take cold!" And she gave me a gentle push, as she finished speaking.

“Indeed, Agatha, I cannot stay; I am very sorry it has happened so, but I could not think of disobeying grandmamma’s wishes, especially as she knew I should be enjoying myself here, and therefore would not have sent for me unless she had a good reason.”

“Oh, old people are full of caprices, but it is often politic and profitable to humour them. Go, dear Esther, I commend your prudence and far-sightedness.”

There was an irony in Agatha’s tone, low and cautious as it was, that piqued me not a little, especially as I could see that Algernon was watching us both. It was not my nature, however, to be quick in resenting, so I answered mildly—“I am sure, Agatha, that you do not think me capable of acting from such mean motives, that you believe that dear grandmamma’s

love is to me far more than anything she could give me!"

"If you are sure of this, you only say it for Algernon's edification. Express your thanks for the condescension, Mr. Algernon Lawne!"

"I only said it in expostulation to you, Agatha; but I must be off directly. Explain the cause of my leaving to your father and mother, if you please."

I was running up the stairs, when Mr. Lawne, entering the hall and finding out the cause of our contention, insisted upon my having his carriage.

"I dare say your kind grandmother will allow you to return almost immediately, my dear."

"Fetch Esther's shawl from the ball-room, and go with her, Algernon; and

mind you bring her back in double quick time, or all the dancing will be over."

Agatha accompanied us to the hall-door. Chancing to look round just as Algernon was going to hand me into the carriage, I saw, by the light of a lamp that fell across her face, that her eyes were full of tears; she bit her lip violently as she noticed my glance of wonder, and instantly turned away.

Algernon and I scarcely said a word all the way. Agatha's strange behaviour had made me uncomfortable and seemed to have cast a gloom over my companion's spirits also. When the carriage stopped, I begged him to wait in it, as grandmamma was not fond of seeing anyone unexpectedly, and I then glided through the apartments to the chapel-room. There I found grandmamma seated near a table with a desk before her,

upon which lay a large fold of parchment. She rose as I came in, and after kissing me affectionately, held me at arm's length while she scrutinized my appearance through her spectacles.

“Wealthy, accomplished, and beautiful!” she murmured, “you will require a vast deal of prudence, perchance many trials before you will learn to shape your course undeviatingly through the steep and briary ways of righteousness.” Then her voice took a livelier tone—“And all this time you are longing to be dancing again—is it not so? Well, forgive me this once for stealing you away from your innocent joys, my child; I want to have some serious conversation with you, can you willingly, cheerfully give me the remainder of this evening?”

“Mr. Lawne expected me back and sent

his nephew with me; if you please, I must just explain to him that I cannot return, and then I will willingly, gladly stay with you, dear grandmamma," I answered, with a smile.

If Algernon was disappointed he did not say so; his manner was grave and reserved as he bade me good-night. My grandmother was thinking of him when I returned to her.

"Algernon Lawne bears a good, a high character, as all the Lawnes do. He is to be married, if common report is correct, to your friend, his cousin."

"I have not heard—but it is not improbable," I replied, with an effort. In an instant a veil seemed rent from my eyes—Agatha's ill-temper, her jealousy, were explained. But not entirely the reserve and apparent frigidity of Algernon. Was

it disapprobation of Agatha's behaviour that had embarrassed him, or had he been led by her to think, to believe that I was won unsought? My heart sickened with apprehension; but soon, through the trouble that darkened my mind, strongly and unwaveringly came the resolution not to be an obstacle in the way of my friend's happiness.

My grandmother had been talking to me for a minute or two, but her words had conveyed no signification to my mind—now they suddenly fell with full meaning upon my ear.

“I stood alone in the dark night beneath a gloomy wide-spreading yew, through the black branches of which a restless, haunting wind sighed unceasingly; a feeling as if death were near me burdened my spirit; above, the clouds, broken, ragged and

tempest-torn, drove wildly over the skies, now hiding, now revealing the ghastly face of the wan moon. A dull, indescribable noise near me drew my gaze from the heavens; I started! for before me yawned a newly-dug grave, and at a little distance beyond stood a shadow, rather than a figure—a shape human in its outline, but indistinct, unsubstantial, yet colossal! and a voice which seemed to float on the air, coming I knew not whence, sighed forth these prophetic warnings—‘ Prepare! for thy days, thy hours are numbered! Do what thou hast to do and delay not, or the shadow of the tomb will fall on the regret that knows no earthly healing!’ ”

My grandmother was silent for a few moments; then she added quite cheerfully —“ Not that I am much of a believer in dreams, as you know, love, but the vision

was repeated as I again sank into a doze, even while the sunset light lingered on that window; and this singular circumstance, naturally enough, roused within me the desire to do quickly all that I intended to do, and this accounts for my sending for you at this unseasonable time."

The heart that is charged with trouble and grief is easily made to overflow. The solemn thoughts of my revered companion seemed to stir like a storm-breeze the wild currents of my emotions, and I burst into a passionate fit of weeping. Grandmamnia was shocked, alarmed: it was some time indeed ere I could check the force of my feelings, but at length I lay quietly and passively on a sofa, catching my breath at intervals and feeling thankful that no one would ever know wherefore I suffered, why my spirit struggled with itself.

An hour afterwards, when we had had a quiet supper together, of which I partook most slenderly and merely to calm my grandmother's apprehensions on my account, the kind old lady again referred to the matter that was uppermost in her mind.

“ I have but a word or two more to say, Esther dear ; pray be composed, you are too sensitive, too fond of old grandmamma ; here's a smelling-bottle—ah, you look better now, my darling child ! Well, in this desk”—(and she pressed her thin white hand on the dark rosewood)—“ I place this parchment, which is my will ”—(she suited the action to the word). “ Now, it will be of consequence to you to remember where this document is put, especially as this secret drawer, you see, has a peculiar fastening and would not be easily discovered—take a sip of my mulled port,

love—and when you are rich, and all I have will be yours you know, remember the poor as you desire blessings on your riches. But I will not distress you further, I know you will not be lacking in charity. Kiss me and go to bed, your spirits need repose.”

After I had laid my troubled head on my pillow and the house was wrapped in silence, poor, dear grandmamma crept into my room to have a peep at me. I lay still with closed eyes, I could not then bear to meet even her gentle gaze, and she presently retired with a whispered “God bless her!”





CHAPTER III.

THE next morning I called on the Lawnes, to take leave of them ere I started for home. Agatha received me kindly, but there was a slight reserve in her bearing which might have been occasioned by a consciousness of having betrayed her feelings unpleasantly the night before. Mr. and Mrs. Lawne were very cordial, and invited me to spend some time with them in the ensuing spring. Algernon was not present; I felt disappointed, and angry with myself for being so.

As I was walking away, however, he overtook me, and offering me his arm begged to be allowed to accompany me to the coach office. He seemed pleased to see me, and in high spirits, while I, trembling with anxiety and agitation respecting the part I felt bound in honour to play, could scarcely reply, to the simplest question or remark, coherently. Suddenly noticing this, he said abruptly—

“I fear Agatha wounded your feelings inconsiderately last night, but you will forgive her, will you not, for the sake of her warm, affectionate heart and her sincere attachment to you?”

“I was perhaps the first offender, and therefore I have nothing to forgive. And believe me, my return for her affection shall not be unworthy of it,” I falteringly replied.

We now turned into a retired part of the town. Our way lay by the river-side; there was no noise of footsteps save our own, no voices on the clear frosty air; the sound of the rippling waters and the whisper of the bare lime boughs above, were all I heard save the quick, loud beating of my agitated heart. It was a minute or two ere Algeron spoke again, and when he did his tones had lost much of their buoyant joyousness—

“ Perhaps we may not meet again for months, for years—I leave for London after the Christmas festivities, you know, to study for the Bar. I shall work hard, I shall succeed, but it will necessarily be a long while first, and I shall often feel sad and weary, perhaps disheartened, but there is a hope that would brighten every care, dispel every sorrow—there is a secret that

weighs down my mind, disturbs the balance of thought with its harassing anxiety—will you, dear Esther, let me tell it to you?”

“Oh, no, no!” I exclaimed hurriedly; “I must not, ought not to hear it!”

He appeared much hurt, as he said—“As you please, I have no right to force my secrets upon you!” After awhile he added sorrowfully—“And have you not one kind wish to give me, Esther?”

“You have my warmest, my most earnest wishes for your success and happiness,” I murmured.

“And yet you will not hear me?” he asked, looking at his watch and slackening his pace. “There is yet time, the coach will not start these twenty minutes; you do not know the pain your refusal will cost me, the blight it will cast over my prospects!”

Unfortunately I never dreamed that the report of Agatha's engagement might be unfounded, my mind was entirely possessed by the dread of failing in my duty towards my friend, and therefore, though I trembled from head to foot, I answered decidedly—"I dare not listen; it would be wrong."

"And wherefore?" he questioned, fixing his dark eyes scrutinizingly upon my blushing countenance; "wherefore would it be wrong? have you been playing the part of a coquette all this time, or is the character natural to you?"

Stung by this taunt, I replied—"You judge me harshly and unjustly. Perhaps, if the reproach had fallen from my lips it would have been less unfair and ungenerous!"

Algernon looked as if he was amazed at my audacity, but he said no more till our

walk was ended and the coach ready to depart; (my sisters had arrived there before me under the guardianship of one of our governesses;) he then handed me in, took leave in a cold, self-possessed manner, and strode away without another look.

I had looked forward to my return to my dear home with such pleasure, but I arrived there dispirited and sad. While Nelly and Lily were racing round the garden and through all the rooms in the house in wild delight—stroking the cat, patting the dog, and feeding over and over again mamma's caged birds, which soon had more food than they could consume in a week, or peeping into the dairy, or even, great girls though they were, into the huge mincemeat bowl, in which Cook was moving the chopper so briskly in preparation for Christmas-pies—I sat in my warm little chamber, unconscious of

the improvements my kind mother had made in it since the last holidays; of the beauties of the new curtains and new carpet, and of the presence of the new vase on the mantelpiece; and looking out upon the frosted garden, wept long and silently.

Of course papa and mamma found out that something was amiss, but, as I told them nothing, they wisely forbore attempting to extort my secret from me; and as my spirits did not improve, in the course of a week or so, they prescribed every imaginable variety of amusement to cure me. My mother made me accompany her in all her morning visits and shopping excursions; and evening parties, balls, concerts, comfortable little dinner parties, and dramatic representations varied the evening entertainments.

At first, indeed, I often found myself at home, when all had been arranged for my

going out to some public amusement, on account of my having been cajoled out of my ticket by some extremely affectionate young friend, who was always so unfortunate as to be prevented securing for herself these charms for the Cerberi of City-sights! And sometimes when I had got seated in some nice place beside mamma, to witness some peculiarly interesting exhibition, or hear some exquisite collection of music, I was ultimately prevented seeing or hearing anything; for mamma, after looking away for a few minutes, would chance to find some one of my particularly-beloved associates seated in my place, and myself doing penance in the undesirable, discarded seat of my fair, guileful friend.

Warned by such results, my mother presently took more care of me and my

tickets; the latter she kept until wanted in her own pocket; and her watchfulness over me became, in public, unremitting, for while conversing with her friends she would place one of her feet so that it rested on the tip of one of mine; thus I could not move without putting her upon the alert, and finding her resolved to baffle my friend-enemies, as she called certain charming young ladies.

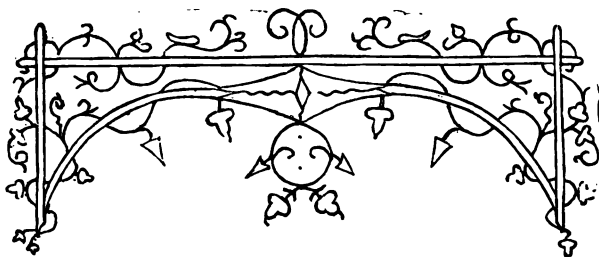
But with all her *finessing* she could not prevent my new gloves finding other hands than mine to try themselves upon, pretty fans and rare bouquets going astray, and my jewels being on a visit when I most wanted them. So poor mamma, almost in despair, kept giving and giving me fresh ornaments, until at length, my casket was really valuably furnished—that is when all my treasures were at home, which was not often—but the new gems travelled like the

old; I never could weigh trinkets against affection—at least until I got a clearer insight into the quality of such affection!

A little incident helped to open my eyes. One morning a rather particular friend of mine (a pretty, lively, good-natured girl, was Lucy Damer!) called, and told me in confidence, as a most amusing thing, that a young lady to whom I had lent a rather peculiar as well as costly brooch, at her earnest request, and who had worn it at a ball at which Lucy was present, had actually claimed the aforementioned ornament as her own! *Some* lady it appeared had made *some* observation which showed that she had *some* notion that the brooch belonged to me; when the fair borrower, determined to turn the tables on poor absent me, had delicately hinted that, in *this one instance*, no doubt a solitary one, the habitual lender had once been the borrower.

I laughed as merrily at this as my lively friend could desire, but I mentally vowed that the treacherous brooch-wearer should never wear her *own* again.

When the frost went away and the west wind whispered promises of spring, instead of allowing me to go and spend a week or two with the Lawnes, as Mrs. Lawne wrote to press me to do, papa bought me a beautiful little horse, with the sweetest temper imaginable, and made me ride into the country with him every morning. And by degrees my melancholy quite left me, I could not help it, though the sound of my own joyous laugh quite shocked me, for a long while. People even said I was growing fat—but of course *that* was not true, for I was never fat in my life; yet, certainly, my cheeks had regained their plumpness and colour, and my eyes their brightness.



CHAPTER IV.

WE had an old quiet pony, which, as a change in my out-of-door amusements, I was accustomed to drive now and then in a little four-wheeled chaise. On one occasion I was driving Lily—who, not having been very well, had been home for a short time—to a village about three miles off, the curious old church of which I wished to sketch; and papa had promised, for he was fond of walking, to take a short cut across the fields and meet us there.

On the road I met an acquaintance, who

asked me to let her ride with us to her home, about a mile distant. It happened we were not going the way she imagined, but were going to turn off the main road a few paces further. But though I disliked the young lady in question—she being one of those odious creatures, a feminine practical joker—I never thought of putting aside her request, but proposed that she should ride to the village with us and partake of the luncheon we had brought; offering, on our return, to drive out of my way to set her down at her father's door.

Of course, she at once accepted my offer! The bores of society never stay to be invited twice, never wait to be pressed! Then she banished poor Lily to the back seat, pretending that she was going to tell me a vast deal of news, and placed herself by my side. Her news proved to be

a sickening chain of descriptions of the results of numerous bad jokes, played off upon her dear credulous friends by her mischievous self.

I was glad enough when we reached the village, and I could begin my sketch, and send her back a little distance to where the phaeton had been left, with the plea that her assistance would be valuable to Lily in arranging the lunch before papa arrived. She was quite ready to do anything—rather too ready, for, under pretence that she had won, by her exertions, the cook's privilege of tasting, she set to work as soon as the arrangement was complete, and made a formidable hole in the provisions, ere I finished my drawing, and papa joined us.

Lily was looking rather tearful over the devastation as we sat down, evidently fearing that she should be held responsible.


At my look of surprise the offender burst out laughing, declaring it was only a joke; but I glanced at sad little Lily's quivering lip, and would not join in her mirth, and papa glanced at a favourite *pâté* of his which was all in ruins, and seemed more inclined to resent, than forgive, this inroad upon his pastric property.

After the refecton was over, I left my companions sitting on the trunk of a prostrate oak, and went back to the spot where I had made my drawing, wishing to compare the copy once more with the reality. I found an error in my sketch which I speedily rectified. Our would-be facetious tormentor came up just as I closed my sketch-book, and I begged her to tell my father, who intended driving back, that I was going to the Common to sketch the bridge, and that I would not detain him more than a quarter of an hour.

I then turned up a lane that led to the large, dreary Green, and I was soon doing my best to take the portrait of the ancient, eccentric, dark little bridge.

Only a very few minutes had elapsed, when I was startled by hearing the sound of wheels quickly receding—what could it mean? some trick I felt most unpleasantly certain was afloat—I did not think I could make myself heard—at all events the idea of shouting at the top of my voice, in a strange place, was not particularly agreeable.

“Perhaps,” I tried to think, “it was not our little phaeton after all, but somebody else’s carriage;” though the lane that connected the Common with the spot I had left was so short, that I could not quite succeed in convincing myself that I should not have heard the approach of any other vehicle.




So I consoled myself with the conviction that, at the worst, the joke would soon be worked out, and then the phaeton would rattle back again. And I laboured away with my pencil, only looking up now and then, to assure myself that the place was not an especially pleasant and cheerful situation for being deserted in.

Just before my feet lay a black, sullen pool or pond, a stream running from which was spanned by the bridge, while all around stretched the barren, rushy Common. There was nothing human to be seen; but a cottage or two peeped out from some trees on the other side of the Green, and a group of sociable geese were standing at a little distance, each balancing itself on one leg and raising and projecting one wing, akimbo-fashion; in short they looked so grotesque and weird-like through the fine,

misty rain that presently began falling, dimming the air as it stole over the Common, that I began to fancy they must be the "Pucks" of the dismal region adopting that form to play pranks on me, and that it would be prudent to decline their company. So away I trudged back to the luncheon place—the phaeton was gone, of a surety! and to complete my discomfort, the rain began to descend in earnest on my umbrellaless head!

With no laggard steps I set off towards home, keeping my ears on the alert, hoping every minute to hear the sound of returning wheels; and I did hear it at last, after I was pretty well tired, and wetted, and frightened. Dear Lily and papa were as glad to see me as I was to see them; and the joker had been set down in disgrace.

The truth was, on going back to my



father, she had informed him that I had gone up another lane, which led directly into the road homewards, intending to saunter along until the chaise overtook me, and see if I could find some flowers for copying at home. After papa had driven some distance, he became certain that I could not have taken this road without being overtaken before then, and he accused the *pâté* devourer of having deceived him; she replied by her usual mode of confession—a loud laugh—to which papa responded with a formal request that she would alight, as he was going back immediately in search of me. She begged to be allowed to go back also; she wished, she said, to see if I bore my misadventure philosophically, and she stated my promise to set her down at her own home.

“ You have put it out of the power of

Esther to oblige you," my father answered, handing her at the same time out of the pony-chaise.

"I never knew a more disagreeable girl!" was papa's last observation respecting her, as he, I suppose, cast an uncomfortable thought back on the devastated *pâté*!

It had chanced in those delightful early-morning rides on horseback, that we had often encountered a gentleman mounted on a handsome gray hunter, whom my father had introduced to me as Mr. Warwick, and who was, according to his own account, always going to meet some pack of hounds somewhere or other, but who, nevertheless, never did on these occasions succeed in meeting them, for he always talked to us till it was too late to try to meet them, and then he resigned himself to his fate and talked on till we reached home.

Sometimes he was invited in, and he never failed to avail himself of the invitation; to say the truth, he often stayed so long that mamma, who liked him notwithstanding, was forced to use polite expedients for getting rid of him; and even with these she was not invariably successful. Once, when the dinner hour approached, to induce him to move, she asked him to stay and dine, confidently believing that as he was in riding costume and much bespattered with mud, he would be certain to excuse himself. But no such thing! he jumped at the invitation with avidity, begged us to excuse his dress, and made himself at home in an instant, and was so agreeable and merry all the evening that mamma couldn't be vexed with him. After that she submitted to her destiny and did not trouble herself about whether he went or stayed.

But presently he changed his tactics: he ceased to come in after our rides, but, uninvited, made his re-appearance in the evenings, dressed stylishly and with evident care. This looked suspicious, especially as at this time he manifested a pertinacious inclination to seat himself beside me and to inflict all his wit and wisdom on my martyred self, and seemed to make it his constant aim to thwart all my efforts to assert my independence.

In fact things came to such a pass that I could not lift up a book, or my work, or my scissors without his begging my pardon, and reproaching me in a soft voice for not having commanded him—(if I had commanded him, it would have been to keep quiet!) I could not move towards the door without his rushing before me to open it, I could not take up my drawing pencils

without his drawing out a penknife and being sure that they wanted pointing—(alas! he sharpened my temper instead!) I could not sing without his singing too, and turning melody to discord; I could not make tea without his insisting upon managing the urn for me, and succeeding in flooding the tea-tray; I could not dismount from my palfrey without stumbling against him, or falling into his outstretched arms; I could not go to a quadrille-party without meeting him and finding myself engaged to him for the whole evening.

In vain I tried to escape from the net of his politeness and devotion—the more I struggled the more inextricably was I entangled!

If I told him I was pre-engaged for a dance, he only smiled and was sure to spirit away the gentleman, who had had the

presumption to solicit the favour of my hand, just as the dance was forming, and then to be ready to take his place; if I would not dance, he would sit by me; if I told him I had much rather alight from my horse unassisted, he would smilingly protest that he could not permit me to run such a risk of dislocating my ankle; and so on—till in despair, I resigned myself to submission, trying to console myself with the facts that Mr. Philip Warwick was very handsome, very good-natured, very rich; and by the conviction that it would certainly be pleasant to show Agatha that I was not wearing the willow for her betrothed.





CHAPTER V.

THE mildly-radiant Spring had shone on our rides, the scented violets had opened and closed their blue eyes on our paths; the song of the cuckoo had floated from the woods day after day as we passed on our early wanderings, and at length had been heard no more; the fragrant buds had long swelled into rich leaf clusters that now formed a beautiful screen from the heat of the solstitial rays, in the quiet, lonely lanes where the cushat's voice alone broke the stillness, where the wild roses hung their

wildest wreaths, and the untrained honeysuckles exhaled their purest fragrance; and Mr. Warwick still accompanied my father and myself, not only in our equestrian rambles, mounted on his tall gray hunter, but also in our walks and drives—and it had become a matter of course that he should do so. The world said we were to be married, but that was *all*; my heart was in a strangely indifferent state, and Philip had never formally and definitively spoken out.


The report of Agatha's engagement to her cousin Algernon had been over and over again confirmed, and I had never admitted the possibility of a doubt respecting the truth of it. I had alluded, in my letters to my friend, to the rumour of her engagement, and she had never denied the existence of the betrothment.

A luxuriously warm, almost sultry evening had set in; soft shadows were creeping further and further over the walks and the lawns of our garden; the sun was hidden behind a mountain of deep purple vapours whose jagged pinnacles and interstices shone with a dazzling, unearthly illumination. But while I was watching the splendours, of the western sky, that kept slowly changing beneath my gaze, from a raised terrace at the further end of the garden, the dying luminary burst flamingly from its screen of woven glory and shadow.

I turned my eyes away, and started to meet those of Mr. Warwick fixed upon me, not that I was surprised to see him—I should have been more surprised not to have seen him, I think—but he looked so curiously; all his easy, polished assurance was gone (I had almost called it effrontery);

he seemed in an awkward state of embarrassment, bewilderment, fright! in fact, he looked exactly as if he had come to make the long-delayed offer, but had found it too much for his nerves. And, as the idea came into my head, (it was positively shocking, but I could not help it) I burst out laughing. He made an outrageously long face at this, which very nearly gave a fresh impetus to my mistimed mirth.

Presently he grew desperate. "Esther—Miss Romsey—may I crave your patience, your seriousness a moment—it is only a formal proceeding I allow, for have we not understood each other's sentiments long ago? I have then only to inquire when you will render me the happiest of men; when you will let me call this little hand *mine*; when you will let me put the golden circlet, emblem of eternal fidelity, on your finger; when....."



He was going on swimmingly, his bashfulness had not tormented him long, when down the gravel-path that led to the terrace, bounding along with sunny curls streaming in the wind, and a step agile as a gazelle's, came Agatha Lawne. She was an invited and most welcome guest, but I did not expect her until the next day. Well, we fell to kissing in the true style of sister-friendship, much to the discomfiture of my handsome lover, who appeared to think that an interruption at such a moment, had something unnatural about it, and that it was still more unnatural and wicked that I should be pleased at it. Heedless of the gloom of discontent that was gathering on his brow, after briefly introducing him, I wound my arm round Agatha's waist and went off with her, gaily humming a new air just then in high fashion.

“Who is this Mr. Warwick, Esther? he looked terribly conscious—upon my word you have kept your secret well!”

“To tell you the truth, Agatha dear, you did interrupt a most interesting dialogue—if dialogue it might be called, in which I laughed and he questioned—but it was getting rather embarrassing, so your appearance at the moment was really fortunate.”

Agatha laughed a little scornfully, then changed the subject. When Mr. Warwick rejoined us in the drawing-room, I noticed that she glanced inquisitively at him, and I observed that she repeated her scrutinizing look whenever she thought she could without danger of being detected. But Philip was not himself that evening, he appeared verging on sulkiness, and was once or twice positively rude to Agatha,

but she only seemed amused; her smile had a peculiar expression, though.

Not a chance of a *tête-à-tête* with Philip now! Agatha and I were inseparable, we walked out, we rode out; we visited, we shopped, and it was always in duet fashion! Of course my lover attended me as usual, and as usual, balked every laudable desire on my part to be independent, and succeeded in keeping every other admirer at a distance.

One morning Philip's mother, with whom it chanced that I was a great favourite, called to take me in her carriage to a beautiful spot where some friends of hers were to assemble—to pass the day wandering about the neighbouring woods and a famous ruin-crowned heath beyond.

Mrs. Warwick had but one place vacant in her carriage, but she made so many

apologies, on account of being unable to take my friend, that Agatha conceived the idea that either Mrs. Warwick or her son really wished her to go; so she flew upstairs, after me, resolved to wheedle me into letting her take my place.

“ Esther, dear, you don’t care about this party, I know! you’ve been to so many gipsy parties and *fêtes champêtres*, and I have never been to *one*—do let me go instead! Your fate, you see, is decided—but I”—and she laughed somewhat bitterly—“ but *I* have a lover to win.”

“ What do you mean, Agatha?” I cried.
“ Algernon and you have not.....”

“ Oh, that was all nonsense! nothing but a little harmless flirtation—I wonder you did not see through it! But you consent, I am sure you do—you are a darling creature—give me that pair of

gloves you have in your hand, I haven't a pair of half so pretty a colour, and I'll be ready in a trice. Ah, here's a shawl-pin, quite convenient, on your pincushion!"

"Stay, Agatha," I began, collecting my thoughts with difficulty, for her few explanatory words had put my brain in a disagreeable state of confusion; "stay, I cannot treat Mrs. Warwick's invitation in this contemptuous way; I have no right to substitute....."

"Oh, I'll make the politest excuses! I'll say that you have a bad headache, and though dying to go, are obliged to lie down."

"No!" I returned, decidedly, "I will not have any untruths told on my account, besides....."

She was running down stairs, she would not stay to hear more. An instant after,

Lily, who was at home for the holidays, came running up. "Why did you say Agatha might go instead of you? She told Mrs. Warwick you had a bad headache, and I'm sure you havn't, have you?"

"Indeed, I have not; it was very wrong of Agatha to say that: I've a good mind to go down myself and explain," I replied.

"Do, Esther: I can't bear Agatha, she's always so cross to me when you and mamma are not by, and calls me 'little girl;' I'm not so very little, am I? Besides it's shameful that a grown-up girl like her should tell a falsehood!"


A noise in the street below attracted my attention. Mrs. Warwick was already in her carriage, and Philip was handing in Agatha; as the latter took her seat she looked up and nodded triumphantly to me, to Lily's intense disgust.

I felt deeply vexed, I really wished to join this party; I had anticipated (for Philip had told me all about it, days before,) dining amidst the grand old ruins of the proud fortress, whose taller and more warlike shadows had, centuries ago, fallen darkly on the suffering land; and wandering amidst the forest trees to the music of murmuring foliage, whispering reeds, and gurgling streams; and mounting the tumuli in the plain beyond, where the battle-tempest gathered and raged, long ere the sun, for the first time, gilded the castle's rising turrets! And besides, I knew that it must appear that I had acted discourteously towards Mrs. Warwick. But these were only passing thoughts and sensations; other thoughts, other feelings remained, and inexpressibly tortured me; the conviction that my sacrifice had been fruitless,

that I had lost a noble heart in vain; that Agatha was utterly unworthy of my attachment, and that she had played a censurable, if not base part in not undeceiving me when I had alluded to her supposed engagement.

Unbidden tears were creeping into my eyes, unsubduable emotions causing my lips to tremble; when Lily crept beside me on the sofa, on which I had sunk, put her soft little arms round my neck and whispered—

“Don’t cry, Esther! now they are gone, you and mamma and I can have such a nice walk together; and, do you know, I’m so glad Mr. Warwick is gone too, he used to tease me and tell me he would take you away, that I ought to be kept in the nursery, and that he would not let me come into his house at all when he had taken you there. But you won’t go there, will you?”



Lily's caresses and consolations had a very different effect from what she expected; they set me crying in earnest; and like a scared bird my little sister flew away, to return the next minute with my dear anxious mother.

"Esther, lie down, my love, and keep yourself quiet for an hour," she advised, tenderly kissing me; "then we'll go out for a walk, if you feel strong enough. By the by, I think I shall not ask Agatha to stay longer than this week, her spirits are too flighty, she worries you; besides, if I'm not deceived, she has a love of mischief."

The shock was rather too much for me, though I struggled to forget; that evening a low fever set in, and I was really ill for a day or two, and did not quit my room. Dear mamma wouldn't allow Agatha to come near me; once I heard her in hot

altercation at the door, but mamma wouldn't yield, and Agatha was forced to retire; nobody, indeed, visited my chamber but our medical attendant, Mr. Sette, except mamma, and darling little Lily, who was always on tiptoe, and always had something nice for me, which, in gratitude, I used to try hard to eat.

When I came down, I inquired for Agatha, and found, to my surprise, that she had gone away; I tried to find out how mamma had managed to get rid of her, but mamma would not tell me then, so I suspected that something unpleasant had passed between them.

Several days elapsed, and Mr. Warwick did not call; I was surprised, mortified, inexpressibly annoyed and puzzled. I had discovered that I cared very little for him, yet now, for the first time I felt anxious to

bring matters to a crisis—to hurry on my fate. I did not dream that the affair could possibly be broken off, I thought myself too deeply implicated to retreat with honour, and I believed Philip to be far too infatuated to be changed by anything I, or others, could do.

A month went by. I asked my mother what was the meaning of Mr. Warwick's avoidance of the house? whether I had had any infectious fever? why she had kept me so secluded? Mamma smiled, then looked so sorry, and at length told me that Philip was not worth a thought, that Agatha had played a false part, and had actually boasted, a day or two after the *fête champêtre*, that my treacherous lover had transferred his devotion to her, in the haunted grounds of olden Chivalry, and had become her sworn knight. My mother also told me

that she had reproached Agatha for her unwomanly, perfidious conduct, and that, in a passion, Agatha had declared she would appeal to my affection for justice, but that she (my mother) would not permit this. Agatha then protested she would leave the house that very day, and forthwith accept an invitation she had received from Mrs. Warwick to stay a fortnight at Elm Court. And she kept her word; she despatched a note to Philip, and Mrs. Warwick's carriage came for her the same evening.

"Thank heaven!" I exclaimed; "I am free!"

My mother looked astonished.

"Yes, dear mamma," I continued, "I am and ought to be thankful for this! to have been the wife of one so fickle, so unprincipled would have been misery indeed. Besides I feel that I never loved him; I

thought him agreeable, I was flattered by his preference, I liked him as a companion, but that was all. Perhaps I did not act quite unblameably myself; I ought to have viewed the affair in a more serious and conscientious light, so do not censure Agatha again so bitterly. I forgive her from my heart!"

Mamma looked relieved, but not satisfied; she observed—"I cannot see that this makes Agatha's conduct appear better. Besides it is an exceedingly unpleasant affair; people will talk so about it. However, you've had a most fortunate escape, there's no denying *that*; and Agatha will undoubtedly punish herself."

And thus mamma consoled herself.





CHAPTER VI.

Soon after my *happy* disappointment had gone forth to the world, and been received with good-natured and ill-natured, spiteful and apologetical comments, a very kind note came from grandmamma, inviting Nelly (a most unusual thing) and myself each to spend a fortnight with her. I was asked to go the first fortnight; but to this arrangement Nelly strenuously objected, on account of being engaged to visit a late school-companion, at the time specified for her *séjour* with grandmamma. At first I

would not consent to allow her to go before me, as I did not like to alter the plan laid down, especially as there was not time to write and receive an answer from our grandmother; but Nelly would not give up the point, and she beseeched me so earnestly, and promised so solemnly to state the case truly to dear grandmamma, that at last, I thought it would be ungenerous not to yield.

Before the period of Nelly's stay had quite expired, mamma received a black-edged letter, in my sister's handwriting. How I watched my mother's countenance as she read it, and how truly I read in her face what the contents of the letter were! Terribly agitated, I sat mute, pale, and trembling, till mamma put the epistle into papa's hands, and covered her face with her handkerchief. I could hardly support myself, but I listened keenly to every word

my father uttered, as he read the letter aloud.

“DEAR MAMMA—Poor grandmamma is no more; she died last night in a sort of a fainting fit, after she had been conversing some time with me. Pray come! for everything is so sad and in such confusion!”

The blow was a terrible one, both from its awful suddenness, and from the deep anguish it brought. I swooned, even while the last words lingered on papa's lips.

My father and mother set out the same day for the house of death; they were deaf to my entreaties to be allowed to accompany them, fearing the effect of painful excitement on my health. But I think their precautions were, in this case, ill-judged, for my imagination was morbidly

alive the whole time of their absence; and the mystery of death is often more fearful in its visioned shape of gloom and imprinted agony, than it is in the serene solemnity of its reality.

When mamma came home, she looked pale and mournful, yet I felt as I looked at her, and heard the sweet, subdued tones of her voice, that her spirit had been calmed and consoled by her last visit to her deceased parent—the smile that had lingered on the placid features of the departed, had cheered the living with its hallowed beauty.

On her part, my mother was shocked at my appearance, I was so haggard and grief-worn; she was evidently anxious and disturbed too, whenever any allusion was made to the property of my grandmother. Nelly, one morning finding me alone, enlightened me as to the cause of this.

“So you are not an heiress, as everybody expected, after all, Esther!” she observed, not ill-pleasedly, I thought.

“Am I not?” I returned, apathetically; “poor grandmamma had a perfect right to dispose of her property as she thought fit, I valued her love far more than anything else she could have given me.”

As I uttered the last words, the conviction suddenly darted through my mind, with a pang so sharp that I with difficulty suppressed a cry, that if grandmamma had altered her will, I must have very seriously displeased her. Nelly went on without noticing the anguish that made me tremble all over—

“The property is to be equally divided, one half to go to mamma, the other to the mother of Algernon Lawne.”

I could not but feel the singularity of

this disposition, knowing that my grandmother, notwithstanding her high opinion of the Lawnes, had never been on visiting terms with them during the time I was at school, though I had some recollection of having heard that she had once been very intimate with one branch of the family. But it was only a passing sensation of wonder.

"Tell me, Ellen, one thing," I cried, calming my voice by a tremendous effort, "did you keep your promise, did you explain the reason of your going to Whitebridge first? and did poor grandmamma show any vexation or even sorrow, at my disobedience to her wishes? Answer me truly, as you value your own and my peace of mind!"

"I told her all, Esther, as I said I would, and so far from appearing displeased she said it was like you to think of others first!"

Nelly said this so seriously and earnestly that I could not doubt her correctness, and yet I was not satisfied. I sought for the reason of the change, until I, at length, arrived at the conclusion that grand-mamma had been induced to rejudge my character by the last proof I had given her of its yieldingness, and influenced by a new feeling of prudence, had made a fresh Will. And here my mind rested quietly, if sadly.

* * * *

Year after year had slipped away. I was twenty-five, and Nelly was married; and to whom? To no other than the awkward Rufus of the juvenile ball—Anthony Haven, Esq., the rising young physician and extraordinarily clever young man, according to popular decision. Nelly had become clever too, and it was universally agreed that they were wonderfully

well suited to each other. Ellen had a snug little fortune of five thousand pounds in hand, and Anthony had a splendid fortune in prospect! who could gainsay such a suitability—especially as neither could reproach the other for a singularity of fiery locks and pink complexion.

I had had one other lover in the interval of unchronicled years; but as I was resolved never again to think of bestowing my hand, renouncing my freedom, unless heart and soul should respond to the preference shown me, he was dismissed, in all civility, at the earliest opportunity.

He had not been absent from our house many months, before he made his appearance again, looking just as happy as when I first saw him, but perhaps a little less hopeful. He had a long consultation with mamma, he was very attentive to all the

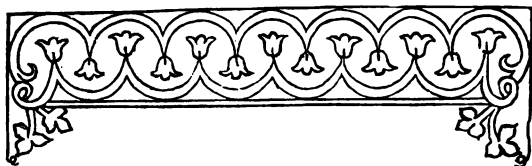
family, papa inclusive, and he glided in and out just as he had done ere his dismissal. I was perplexed and embarrassed; but he paid me no exclusive attentions, and therefore I could make no frigid demonstrations.

It chanced one day, that I caught Lilian and my lately never-to-be-comforted lover, talking so engrossingly together in the garden, in a pretty, embowered recess of greenery and blooms, where the beeches flung their coolest, deepest shade, and wilding periwinkles wandered unrestrained; where the wearied zephyrs brought luscious scents on their loaded wings, and the nightingales warbled forth their most loving lays—that the approach of poor me was unobserved. Innocently I paused, and regarded them a moment. I saw Mr. Adolphus, the rich banker of at least thirty-five, the sedate money-maker, kissing with knight-like de-

votion the little hand of sylph-like Lily, and stood fairly astounded, till the low-murmured words "eternally adore," just heard amidst other half-smothered sweet words, sent me away with the speed of light!

And so the mystery was cleared up, and Lily, the pet, the darling of the house, whom we all called little Lily, and nobody suspected was a grown-up woman, though she was out of her teens, unless it was mamma since her interview with the chivalrous banker, was selected, and had made her election!

It was petrifying! For the next twenty minutes after my flight, I was on the verge of hysterics, but luckily I did not slip in.



CHAPTER VII.

It was my custom, when I had letters to answer, to write in my own room before retiring to rest, and I was seated at my desk, late in the evening of that happiest of days to Lilian, when the door opened softly and in glided, like a fair spirit of the moonlight night, pretty Lily herself, her bright dishevelled locks falling like a shower of golden beams to her slender waist, and her large, loving eyes shining like stars through the dew of happy tears.

“Is anything the matter, Lily dear?” I asked, with a smile.

“ Oh, no, nothing! but if you will listen I will tell you a *secret* ;” and she seated herself close beside me.

I was amused at the air of importance with which she pronounced the word “secret,” but I schooled my features into seriousness, and placed my arm caressingly round her snow-white neck, as I whispered — “ Well, Lily, what is it ? ”

“ Can’t you guess, Esther, *why* Gervase — Mr. Adolphus came back ? ” she murmured, her fair head drooping timidly, and her voice trembling a little.

“ I think I can, darling ; you were better, perhaps, suited to him than I, and perhaps he has found this out.”

“ And there’s no harm, is there ? and you won’t love me the less ? ”

“ Why should I, Lily ? but I shall miss you sadly when you are gone ; and Lily

dear, are you sure that you love him enough to leave your dear home and our kind parents, to go forth with him, not into a garden of bright sunshine, soft breezes, and sweet flowers, but into a life of storms and battles, of struggles and trials? Remember he is older, much older than you, he is graver, more thoughtful—he may, perhaps, sometimes become impatient with your gaiety, and you may feel impatient at his gravity—could you bear a harsh word uncomplainingly, could you forbear to reproach him even if you believed he had wronged you by word or deed? do you feel prepared to toil with him, to suffer with him if needful, and had you rather do this than live a life of ease and quiet enjoyment here?”

Meekly but steadily Lily's sweet voice answered me—“ I could do this, and more

than this; I would rather be shut up in a dungeon with Gervase, than have the whole world with its rich palaces, its fine cities, its glorious woods, its flowers, its singing-birds, all for my own without him! Yes, his love is worth more to me than that of whole troops of friends! Oh, Esther, how could you have trampled such a treasure beneath your feet?"

"I did not trample it, Lily; I could not give back treasure for treasure, that is all."

"It is strange; but I am glad it was so. But mamma—will you tell her, Esther—tell her how I longed to confide in her, but that I could not bring myself to speak?"

"Mamma is not deceived, I fancy; but I will do your behest, dear Lily," I replied. "So now good-night, it is growing too late for you to be up."

Lily laughed and shook her head de-

fiantly, as if she was strengthened now to scorn any charge of juvenility; and then with a swift, noiseless step, flitted away.

Our connexion with the Lawnes had been entirely broken off since my estrangement from Agatha, who had now been married some years to Mr. Warwick. It was whispered abroad that she and her husband did not live very happily together, and of this sad state of things, a few months before Mr. Adolphus made his second appearance, I had a tolerable proof. One morning Mrs. Warwick's carriage came for me, and a note from Agatha was brought me. It was curiously written, half-imperiously, half supplicatingly; and she asked me to come to her, alleging that she must speak to me on a subject of great importance to both of us.

Of course I decided to go; I felt no

malice towards her, and though I did not believe the matter referred to concerned me, I thought that possibly I might give her some advice that would prove beneficial. But mamma was averse to my yielding to Agatha's wish.

"I am sure that woman is plotting again—I would not go near her!"

"But, mamma, I might be of some use, perhaps," I remonstrated.

My mother shook her head incredulously, but papa supported me.

"Esther is right, I think, my love," he said to her; "she only shows a proper spirit in ceasing to remember Mrs. Warwick's injurious behaviour. But at the same time, be on your guard, Esther!" he added, turning to me.

A beautiful place was Elm Court (the seat of the Warwicks), with its fine park,

rich with wooded slopes, its lovely gardens, and protecting forest-lands—but there was an unmistakable air of neglect in its appearance, which seemed to signify that none took pride in its beauty. The interior of the house, a large, rambling, recently gothitized building, afforded similar indications—the sumptuous furniture had not the brightness of care upon it, but the dinginess of idleness, the markings of misuse; its arrangement seemed to have been the work of accident not taste, and its neglected splendours had no welcoming air of comfort.

In a luxurious boudoir, sat my once beloved friend, Agatha Warwick; and it grieved me to see her brow so prematurely wrinkled, not by study or the care that is born of poverty or fear, but by evident discontent and ill-temper; to see her face so pale and thin, and her form so drooping,

as if ill-health had added its burden to the cankering weight on her spirit.

After the first salutations, somewhat coldly given and returned, Mrs. Warwick observed—"How well you look, Esther! but it is no wonder, you have not my troubles and torments: fretful children, impertinent servants, and a husband who cares no more for you than a hound or a hunter, are enough to kill anybody, and they are killing me as fast as they can!"

"Oh, Agatha!" I exclaimed, "how can you speak so of your husband? of him you have vowed to love and....."

"How can I?" she interrupted me, mockingly; "oh, it's easy enough, when you have learnt to be despised, to be deserted for the society of worthless wretches, to be wished out of the way! These are pleasant experiences, are they not? don't you wish yourself in my place?"

"I did not come here," I said, reproachfully, "to listen to your complaints, your revilings of your husband; and if you have nothing else to say, I must leave you."

"I have a great deal to say; but you do not care for my sufferings, I see—you have quite forgotten all our old friendship. I have no one in the world to care for me now, but mamma, and she thinks me in the wrong."

Agatha's tone became so sad and desolate, that it quite moved me. I put my arm round her, as I used to do long ago, and bade her be comforted.

"Oh, that's easy to say," she returned, quickly, almost irritably; "I will just prove to you that I have *cause* to deplore my fate. My medical man came this morning—I was rather alarmed about my lungs, I have such a cough, at times; however, he would give

me no opinion, but said he would come again with his stethoscope; a minute after he had left me, I followed him down stairs, and hearing him conversing with my husband in the library, I paused in the hall: through the nearly closed door came the consoling words—

“ ‘ I can’t speak positively, but I fear her life is not very certain, for she’s undoubtedly consumptive, and she’s nervous, and frets herself into a fever; you must take her to the seaside, somewhere on the south or west coast, and let her have plenty of amusement—it is her best chance of recovery.’ ”

“ This was the doctor’s voice, of course; then Philip replied—

“ ‘ She wouldn’t be quiet anywhere, ’t isn’t in her nature; and the worst of it is, she will not let anybody else have a quiet life;

but I suppose I must take her off somewhere or other, for a few weeks.'

"Now don't you admire this picture—Philip as a tender, anxious, devoted husband? and don't you envy me?" and Agatha broke into a wild, ironical laugh, which ended in a violent fit of coughing. This latter seemed to frighten her; and, as soon as she recovered breath to speak, she began in a subdued manner, to tell me why she had wished to see me.

"Life to me is now so uncertain, you see, and there are a few disagreeable memories I would gladly get rid of. I don't apologise to you, remember, about Philip, since I have wronged myself, far more than you, who have virtually been greatly benefitted, though you can't believe it, by my running away with your lover."

"I can readily believe it," I replied,

“since I felt relieved the moment I heard the result of your visit to the ruins. I was previously in a false position; perhaps, too, things had not gone so far as you imagine. Mr. Warwick’s wooing was all in dumb show, pantomimic, until the moment when you interrupted us, and then I had not spoken in reply.”

“It is all very well to say this now,” retorted Agatha, with an air of mortification, at the same time coldly drawing away from my encircling arm.

I felt angry at the insinuation, but anxious to conclude the interview, I replied, mildly, “It matters little to me whether you believe my statement or not, but give me the clue to your conduct—you were not instigated by love?”

“No, indeed! if you will know—by *revenge!*”

"By revenge?" I repeated, in amazement.

"Yes, revenge. Do you not recollect how you sported with Algernon's heart, just to torture mine? *then* was it that I vowed to make you *feel* it when I had the opportunity, and I should earlier, if you hadn't been so callous. I told Algernon, that child as you then were, you were an accomplished coquette. And as soon as I found you were engaged, I determined to strain every nerve to win Philip from your side, and I succeeded. He could not stand my description of your derision of his proposal."

"Stay, Agatha! why do you tell me all this?"

"Because, as I said before, I wish to get rid of disagreeable memories."

"But confession is not reparation; they will and ought to haunt you still, if you rest content with the disclosure."

"But how can I make reparation, when no injury has been done?"

"You have injured me deeply," I cried, with warmth, "to a degree that few women would forgive! you have dimmed an innocent character with charges of levity and heartlessness, which you knew to be false!"

Agatha's eye quailed before mine; she moved uneasily, as if in pain. "Tell me what I can do?" she murmured faintly.

"Unsay what you have said to Algernon!" was my eager response.

"Impossible! it cannot be done, Esther."

"But it must be done!" I returned, firmly. She looked at me a moment defiantly, then her countenance changed, and she burst into tears.

"You are very hard upon me, Esther; but I must have peace of mind, at any price. Say you forgive me, and I will write to Algernon."

"I do forgive you most sincerely, and you have my earnest wishes for your restoration to health and happiness. May I also offer you one word of advice? Try, then, to think less bitterly of your husband's faults, to be forbearing. No husband was ever reclaimed by contemptuous words or a disdainful manner."

"But I don't wish to reclaim him, I had rather detest than love him—it gives me more pleasure."

"Oh, Agatha, this is wrong, very wrong," I began, unutterably shocked at the evil feeling she showed; but she interrupted me, passionately exclaiming—

"I will not hear a word more of reproach from you, I have done my duty towards *you*; leave me!"

"Not in this frame of mind, Agatha," I said, more soothingly; "I beg of you to

try to be more composed, more patient, less vindictive."

She was silent a few minutes; after which, she rejoined quietly, "I am composed now, I again request you to leave me, your presence distresses me injuriously."





CHAPTER VIII.

Lilian's betrothment met the approbation of all her friends and relatives (especially that of her household kindred), not excepting the Havens, who were apt to be cynical in most matters connected with their sunnier, or shadowier-haired kinsfolk. But papa stipulated, when he gave his consent, that Mr. Adolphus should not claim his bride until he had served a year in the apprenticeship of a lover's subjection, which mamma, and myself, and Ellen thought an admirable condition.

It happened about the time that Lily's engagement was made public, that our family met the Warwicks at an evening party given by a lady who was intimate with both families. It was the first time such a meeting had occurred since the rupture, and I cannot conceive how it came to pass then, unless Agatha, by her avowed wish for it, had brought it about, for the circumstances of her marriage had been freely commented on, and the causes and consequences canvassed far and near; indeed, the friends of the two families had ranged themselves round the Romseys and Warwicks in a very Montagu and Capulet fashion.

Saddened and grieved as I had felt, for a long while after my interview with Agatha, on account of her evident unhappiness, and the dark and bitter spirit with which she combatted her trials, brighter

and calmer thoughts had by this time worn out the pain of the remembrance of our stormy conference. I had almost ceased to think of her at all, ever since the glowing hopes that had been called into life by her promise of reparation, had died away in utter hopelessness, and dear Lily's happiness had awakened my liveliest sympathy.

Therefore, though glad to see that she appeared to have regained her health, Agatha's presence caused me no vivid emotions of either pleasure or disquietude, and I was enabled to meet her with cool composure. This was the more satisfactory as I was aware that many eyes watched, curiously, our encounter. Mr. Warwick was stiff, cold, and awkward, while Agatha at first affected great suavity of manner: but as I coolly declined the patronage she seemed graciously disposed to bestow on me, she

next appeared resolved to overawe me, as well as outshine me in appearance. She was magnificently attired, while I was studiously plain in my dress, but her assumed loftiness could not conceal the shade of discontent that disfigured her brow, the gloomy fire of envy that burned in her eyes, or the ill-temper that lurked in the corner of her smile.

After awhile, finding that she could not disconcert me, she turned suddenly, with a malicious smile, to some one behind her, some one who was hidden from my sight by a circle that had formed round her—

“ Since this is a meeting of old friends,” she said, in a voice loud enough to invite the attention of all in the room, “ an hour sacred to the revival of old friendships, your attendance is requisite, Algernon. Come forward and let me re-introduce you to Miss Romsey.”

I was totally unprepared for this! I had never seen Algernon since our parting, years and years ago, at the coach door. I had begun indeed, mentally to repudiate the possibility of our ever again coming into contact. Woman-like, I thought of my dress so simple, so Quakerish—I longed for the gems that were enriching my casket at home, and even for those which, lent to Lily, were sparkling on her neck and arms, I longed for the richest of my rich dresses, but it was only for an instant that my thoughts thus frivolously wandered, for deeper feelings stirred my heart to its very depths as Algernon came forward with an air of frigid indifference, meant to inform me that it was but at his cousin's request he presented himself.

How altered he was! the frank, joyous, warm-hearted friend of my school holidays

had been metamorphosed into a perfectly handsome, perfectly well-bred, perfectly composed man of the world—cold as a petrification, stately as the statue of a king! at least, so I judged as he walked up to me with measured steps, and an immovable countenance, and offered me his icy hand. His coldness was contagious, luckily, for no sooner did I touch that hand than the hot blood left my tell-tale cheeks, and I became as rigid and dignified as he. A glance at Agatha still more strengthened me in calm endurance—her eyes were fixed vulture-like on me, as if they would pry into my heart-secrets—search out and feast on each hidden suffering!

Our greetings were formal enough: and I was greatly relieved when Mr. Adolphus, with the smiling Lilian on his arm, looking her brightest and best, and our father and


mother joined the group, and the conversation became general.

“ Really, Miss Lilian, you have grown immensely since I saw you last; you used to be the prettiest little fairy in creation—positively I should not have known you!” Agatha observed suddenly, with a malicious smile.

“ Should you not?” returned Lily, simply—“ why I should have known you anywhere, Mrs. Warwick, notwithstanding that so many years have passed, and that you were not looking quite yourself at our last parting.”

Lilian had kept out of Agatha’s way after the *fête champêtre*, in her fervent resentment at her treatment of me, consequently she had not seen her later than that day.

“ What do you mean?” inquired Agatha, quickly.




“Need I explain? were you not prepared for a part, as well as a party?”

“In the Comedy of Errors !” I added, half to myself, it seemed horribly ill-natured, but it was really thoughtlessly said.

Papa and mamma smiled ; Agatha looked daggers at me, and Algernon seemed puzzled.

Singularly enough, there was a discussion on coquetry that evening in the brilliant drawing-room of our hostess, after most of the elders had slipped away to cards. I scarcely knew how it commenced, and had not followed the hostile arguments very closely, being only conscious that some of the ladies, and even gentlemen, had been contending that coquetry was not only a legitimate means of defence accorded to woman to protect her against the arbitrariness and treacherousness of the opposite



sex, but was a graceful veil of modesty which mystified her feelings, and made them as beautifully vague and uncertain to the gazer, as pale glimpses of a mist-wrapped sky. But all of a sudden, Agatha dragged me into the debate, by calling aloud to me, as I sat on a sofa at some little distance—

“Do let us have your opinion, Miss Romsey, on this all-important subject. I have no doubt but you have thought much upon it. Do you, or do you not, approve of coquetry?”

“I disapprove of it, most decidedly—as being unwomanly, undignified, and unprincipled!” I spoke without hesitation, for I noticed a gleam of interest in Algernon’s eye which somehow reminded me of old times, and I was too desperate, in the anguish I was suffering, to feel embarrassed or nervous.

"A sweeping impeachment!" said Agatha, sarcastically. "Gentlemen, will you not take up the gauntlet which my friend has so dauntlessly thrown down, or must I go on?"

"Oh, go on, by all means, Mrs. Warwick, no one but yourself would have any chance against your fair opponent!"

"I would ask then, in all deference to your ratiocinative abilities, Miss Romsey, how you would prove that coquetry is unwomanly, since it certainly was invented and perfected by woman, and since it is the reverse of *manly*?"

"Unwomanly signifies unbecoming a woman, unworthy of a woman."

"And why do you term it undignified? what woman is so queenly as the practised, the finished coquette?"

"Abasement is the opposite of dignity, and she that swerves from the high path of

rectitude in her love of diversion or of triumph, humbles herself most unqualifiedly, sacrifices dignity to caprice or vanity!"

Agatha hurried on—"And what is there unprincipled about it?" she demanded.

"It is altogether unprincipled! it is an acted deceit—a deliberately-contrived delusion—a violation, in spirit, of the pure principles of truth! What right-minded, generous-tempered, truly refined woman could feign sentiments that were unacknowledged in her heart—could inflict pain to show her power, that she might exult in her triumph:"—

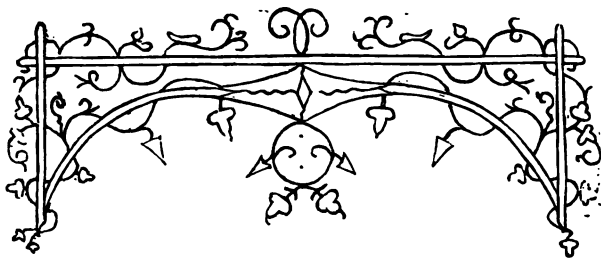
"Oh, you are a devout believer in broken hearts, death-stricken lovers, and such ridiculous fables," interrupted Agatha, spitefully.

"I believe that very few hearts can be

broken, or would be worth breaking, and first of all would I insure those of the practised and finished coquettes;" I replied, with a smile.

Mamma now rose to go; one glance I gave at Algernon: was I deceived by some old pleasant memory, or did he really look so changed, so like—though with a nobler, loftier, manlier expression—the Algernon of my school-days?





CHAPTER IX.

ONE rich August morning, when the sunshine flooded the earth with its full tide of glory, while the dew lay thickly on flower and leaf and spear-like blade of grass, on the featherly fern, and the trailing creeper; while the silvery gossamer floated on the drowsy breeze, and the yellow corn whispered its fairy music as the wind-path marked it slightly, *we*—that is, papa and mamma, the lovers and myself—set out to spend a day in the woods, and amidst the ruins.

Lily and I, and Mr. Adolphus were on horseback: papa and mamma, a servant and the stout hampers, containing all sorts of delicacies, not forgetting papa's favourite *pâtés*, followed in the pony-carriage. I was rather averse to go, at first, for old, happy memories had haunted me, tauntingly, since the painful excitement I had undergone, on meeting Algernon so unexpectedly and tryingly, and had rendered me unfit to enjoy any amusement; besides the associations of the place were rather humbling. Papa, however, insisted that I should go, which I thought rather strange under the circumstances, especially as he had always been indulgent to perfection, of all my whims and fancies. But perhaps he was right, for the bright sunshine, and the beautiful scenery that surrounded us, as we cantered along sweet, winding lanes, or up gentle

ascents, did much to charm away my troubled thoughts.

We put up our horses at a farmhouse, close by the forest, left our hampers within the magic circle of the ruined walls, with the servant, and went off for a stroll in the wood shades.

Of course, the lovers soon found a path for themselves; of course, papa and mamma, as all papas and mammas do on such occasions, soon found that they had seen enough, and came to the conclusion that it would be desirable to rest on the prostrate trunk of a noble oak that lay temptingly in their way, and, of course, I, as the odd person of the party, was left to ramble alone, uncared for and unsought. Was it strange then, that I became almost hysterical, as I found myself alone in the forest depths—alone with wild, mocking thoughts, that

seemed inclined to play and dance a dirge over the grave of my sacrificed hopes.

Hark! what sound is that, whispering through the forest-grass, behind me? it grows defined and marked, a rapid decisive step is approaching me. What form, tall and shadowy, looms through the low, drooping foliage? Nearer it comes, and nearer—it is close beside me—there is a mist over my eyes, an indistinctness in my hearing; but it seems to me that the hand that now presses mine, the eyes that gaze into my own, the voice that sounds in my ears, are those of the dear Algernon of our youthful merry-makings, not the statuesque Algernon of the Warwick clique!

How Algernon discovered that we were in the forest, he would not tell, but I suspect papa was in the secret, for he wasn't at all surprised when we both came back

together, to dine in the shade of the ruins, (and we were desperately late,) and he smiled so provokingly too! besides, this conjecture may explain why he insisted so strenuously on my coming. And how Algernon found out that I was not a professed coquette, but the Esther of his early dreams, I may explain to my readers, perhaps, some future time—it was certainly not through Agatha's adherence to her promise.

We had another ramble after dinner, and papa and mamma were left to have a comfortable doze in the shades of antiquity. After we had walked a short distance in silence, Algernon said, saucily, "And, since you did at last, this morning, listen to the telling of the secret, confess to me what freak it was that possessed you to refuse to hear it on a certain unforgotten day, years ago."

"It was no freak," I replied, earnestly and sorrowfully; "I believed that you were beloved by, and engaged to, another."

"And was your refusal a sacrifice on your part?" he inquired, with much eagerness and feeling.

"How can you doubt it?" I returned, a little reproachfully.

"I do not, now; but oh, if I had but dreamed this, *then*, how much of suffering might have been saved us! if I could but have guessed what a subtle web of treachery was being woven about you, I should have read your character aright. But were you not"—and he resumed his saucy, catechising tone—"were you not in imminent danger of being married to that cousin-in-law of mine, Philip Warwick?"

"I cannot say how imminent the danger was," I replied, a little confused; "my mind

was in a morbid sleep, tortured by dreams, incapable of voluntary action—how near, or how probable its spontaneous awakening might be, it is impossible to tell.”

“And had you married him, I should have lived and died with that false, evil opinion darkening and defacing the beauty of my image of you, wedded to my soul in its haunting misery! and you would have been the wife of one, who promises to be, if he is not already—a heartless profligate.”

“Oh, do not speak of it!” I exclaimed, shocked at the picture. “It seems to me now, that *that* could never have been. My awakening must have come, even if I had not been so rudely roused; my infatuation appears to me incomprehensible, now.”

“Ah, in the different phases a character assumes, as we view it in fainter, or stronger lights, or through different mediums of

thought and feeling, how differently we judge it. But, to do him justice, I believe that the Philip Warwick, who wooed, and almost won a certain fair lady, to whom we will not more particularly allude, was blameless in character, and not altogether destitute of heart. Weakness has been his ruin—he was too weak to resist the flatteries, to disbelieve the artful falsities of a fascinating girl, though engaged, in honour, to one so much superior; he was too weak to govern the wife who had won him, not because she was worthy to gain the heart of a man of virtue and principle, for she was not, but because she had bent all her energies, exerted her strong will to subject him. He has been, it is said, too weak to resist the baneful, the fatal influence of a troop of convivial, unprincipled associates (repelled as he is by the discomforts of a scolding wife, and ill-

managed household), who were attracted by the dazzle of his wealth, as moths by the flame of a candle. And he will be, I fear, too weak to withstand the temptations which will be brought before him, by yet a deeper set of scoundrels, who will hunt him out as surely as the bloodhound tracks by scent his destined victim."

"And what will be *her* fate? poor Agatha!" I exclaimed, sadly.

"She is greatly to be pitied; and assuredly not the less that she has wrought her own misery, and that of her family, by her own hands. Knowing her nature well, knowing how deeply she conceives herself to be injured by her husband, knowing how strong is the feeling of revenge in her bosom, and being acquainted with the characters of her most favoured companions, I might guess what will be the termination

of all this; but let us not dwell on a subject so painful, let us throw a veil over her past faults, as well as her probable sins in the future."

"But," said I, "you once had great influence over her, could you not exert it now, for her benefit?"

"There is but one way of obtaining power over her, since her nature has become so perverted, and that would be abhorrent to me; if I could flatter her, and pretend a great regard for her, if I would listen applaudingly to her abuse of her husband, I might succeed in nullifying the influence of her evil advisers. I have argued, remonstrated with her as a friend, a relative, but it was in vain; she only got up a furious charge against me of having been the cause of all her sufferings, by deceiving her in her girlhood; of having crushed the first

warm feelings in her heart, and embittered her disposition; of having caused reports which ruined her peace of mind for evermore—reports, which I have strong reason to believe, she herself originated, and which, it appears, were the cause of our long estrangement, dearest Esther. But here come your sister and Mr. Adolphus.”

Lily was blushing like a newly-opened rose, as she bent her swan-like neck and drooped her eyelids, while listening to the honied sayings of the grave, astute banker, and her fair little fingers were cruelly busied in pulling to pieces a lovely cluster of wild honeysuckles. She looked up, as she heard our approaching voices, and blushed a still rosier red as she met my smiling glance. We all returned to the ruins together, as it was growing late.


As we approached the limits of the

forest, the sunset-rays, horizontal and brilliant, came pouring through the low beech-boughs, broken into a shower of golden stars. A minute or two afterwards we came full in sight of the vast, but crumbling fortress, within which we had gaily dined, and which now stood majestically dark, and beautifully defined in its wild decay, against the flaming sky. Through clefts and breaches in the western walls, through a solitary loophole, a broken arch, and shapeless apertures where the windows of olden times flung their traceried shadows, streamed the yellow light. From one lonely tower, the grim, deformed warden of the wilderness, an ivy pennant waved as the breeze swept over the plain, while, in the purple shades which extended beneath, amidst fragments of pillar and wall, showers of rose petals littered with sweetness the

ground, as they whisperingly fell from wild, untrained bushes, suckers from some ancient stocks, whose blooms gardeners of ancient times had watched and tended, and fair dames of antiquity gathered and admired.

We did not start to return home just yet; we had to make tea with the aid of a gipsy-like fire, kindled by means of matches and dry leaves, and sustained by the decayed wood of the forest; and we had to talk about, and moralise about those ancient times.

I need not say who rode by my side, as we returned through the wan, witching, moonlighted fairy-land of the summer night, while Lily and Mr. Adolphus took care to keep out of hearing, doubtless not entirely in the fear of becoming acquainted with our sayings. I need not hint at the subject of our conversation: who can tread



the paths of Night, with her mighty mysteries overarching earth, her bewildering beauties thronging around, and not become romantic—for what is romanticism, in its true sense, but the being imbued with a deep yearning for the beautiful, the ideal, the spiritual?





CHAPTER X.

ALGERNON wanted to hasten on our marriage that it might take place ere the glowing sun of the harvest had sunk to its final rest, but papa said No, he should treat both his future sons-in-law alike; Lily and myself should both be married the next summer, and on the same day; and if Algernon did not like this he was welcome to find another bride. I never saw papa so positive, but I dare say he was not talking at random; perhaps he wanted to

see a little more of Algernon first, though that was quite unnecessary.

* * * *

The year went by swiftly, blissfully, hopefully to our six happy selves—I say *six*, because, of course, papa and mamma sympathized with their children, real and adopted—and at last the memorable day arrived.

The evening before, Algernon and I had been watching the sunset, it was gorgeous but threatening. “So perhaps may our life be, stormy, yet beautiful,” he murmured; “those sweet rose-tints emblemize the beauty of happiness, those menacing purples foreshadow the grandeurs of the tempest, and see—the divine light of the hidden sun glorifies their rich darkness—and thus may the heavenly radiance of love gild our trials!”

“So be it!” I returned, “the glory of the tempest is preferable to the dead twilight of the shroud-like mist. The stern toils and trials of life, when sanctified by holy aims, are better for the soul than the lifeless calms of unvarying pleasure and utter rest.”

Algernon's face brightened as if the sunshine rested on it, as he said with enthusiasm—“What are life's trials that we should shrink from them? what are life's misfortunes that we should murmur and repine? I often feel that it is only through martyrdom that the spirit can be purified, glorified! He that coward-like quails at the shadow of pain or the echo of scorn, that trembles at the first sign of factious hostility, or is at the mercy of popular opinion with its fitful ebb and flow as the sands of the seashore are at the mercy of the

surging ocean, acknowledges this world as his resting-place, his home—thus his joys are limited, unsatisfying, and dimmed by insecurity—his sufferings, sufferings indeed! While he that lives in the light of an ever-present hope and faith, that travels through life as through an alien land, a desert of dangers that must be crossed ere his rest is won, scarcely feels the thorns that wound, the sun that scorches him, or the sickness that lays its heavy hand upon his head. And when love enriches, while religion hallows existence, those thus graciously favoured are indeed fenced from bitter griefs and unendurable pains, and dowered with blessings beyond all other blessings!”

The morning broke inauspiciously—the rain came down in heavy squalls, and the thunder rolled heavily and gloomily. Lilian

was a little tearful about it; but papa soon laughed her into spirits again. And after awhile the day brightened and the sun shone upon the brides in their snowy satin robes, rich lace, and gleaming gems; and the sunshine of the soul was there too, not the less, if it did not shine forth too perceptibly, if their tell-tale eyes, bright dials of the heart, were carefully veiled by their guardian lashes!



AFTER THE HONEYMOON.

WHEN I commenced this little history, I had thought to have concluded it with the account of the double wedding, but while, just after the days of our honeymoon, I was, at Algernon's saucy request, jotting down my confessions, and had got to the conversation with poor, kind grandmamma in which she mentioned the report which turned so abruptly the happy current of my fate, with a sudden flash of memory my grandmother's instructions about the find-of her Will came back to me! How strange it seems that I should not again have thought of her words till then!

Algernon appeared flattered, for he said it was a sweet evidence of my all-engrossing, long-lasting attachment to him, but I am afraid it proved, as well, my natural carelessness and thoughtlessness.

Well, we went off at once to find and examine the desk, which was most fortunately stowed away by mamma among her precious relics; though I was in distracting doubt of it then, as I never remembered seeing it since those last evening-hours spent with dear grandmamma.

The desk was found, and the secret drawer, and the Will placed just as I had seen it placed by the deviser, and she was not angry with me, or distrustful of me, and I am an heiress after all! but it won't make much difference, for I shan't take Algernon's half share, which he inherited long since, away; and I shall let Ellen and

Lilian each have a third of the other moiety; perhaps I shall pretend, though, to be a little more independent in money matters with respect to dress and household expenses. I shall not discuss with Algeron quite so often and so solemnly the advisableness of buying a new song, or a new book, or extending the number of my tumblers and table-cloths, my scent-bottles and save-alls, or replacing some antiquated piece of furniture with some beauty in first-rate fashion and style. Perhaps, too, I shall indulge myself with trinkets and gloves, *ad libitum*, keeping always sufficient to lend to needy and deserving friends.

And that puts me in mind, that, after all, I have not lost a fortune by over-generosity, and that I may not have been too-generous—perhaps I ought to have omitted the “too” in the title to this simple narrative,

only I abhor self-praise, and being called "conceited!" So I'll e'en be content with it, as it is, and each reader may form his own opinion as to the appropriateness, or inappropriateness of "The Confessions of a Too-generoꝛs Young Lady."

Now I am pen in hand, I may as well inform such as are curious about such matters, that Nelly and her husband get on capitally together, and that you never enter their house without hearing a screaming or laughing duet from a pair of fiery-headed babies, twins, which always seem to be everywhere, and which are solemnly and everlastingly petted and praised, in a style awfully trying to my auntship, as I feel absolutely distracted between the decorous desire to preserve a proper gravity, and the naughty wish to laugh outright.

Lily and the grave banker seem even

more felicitously matched. Theirs is the union of the bright sunbeam and the quiet shadow, of the spirit of song and the spirit of wisdom, of careless joy and thoughtful care!

As to Algernon and myself, I need only say that the days are never sufficiently long for all we have to say, and think, and do.

But is it not provoking that papa and mamma, who used to make such pets of Lily and me, don't seem to fret the least since we have left them? they sit down to their nice little dinners with just as good an appetite, and mamma has her quiet sleep in the drawing-room afterwards, and papa enjoys his cigar in the dining-room just as usual; and then they sit over their tea so luxuriously, and sip, and eat rusks or toast, and read or talk just as if they hadn't a grief in the world! in fact they

are cosier than ever, and mamma is growing quite stout. She says, in her smiling way, that it is because she has less care and anxiety now that we are all settled in life, but that means—less *trouble*. Papa even indulges in an additional cigar pretty frequently, I've discovered, satisfying himself with the comfortable reflection that if the consumption damages his constitution, it benefits the poor young tobacconist in the next street, who has four dots of children and a sickly wife, and wants a little encouragement.

All this proves to me that our going away to new homes has been a relief, not a cause of regret: well, though it is provoking to be so easily dispensed with, it is pleasant to think they're so happy, and that they cannot scold us for having made bad choices.

With regard to poor, misguided Agatha, there is really nothing but sorrow and disgrace to tell, and it would pain me too much, entirely to lift the veil from her darkened fate. Her home is no longer her home—she has gone forth a voluntary wanderer with a companion high in rank, but low in character; the future for her is settling down in deeper and deeper gloom.

And Philip Warwick is treading with rapid steps the downward road to ruin, lighted by the flaring gaslights of the mid-night gaming-table, mindless of the grievous, neglected state of his two motherless little girls! It is a sad picture, but a sadder one still must describe the end of all this, though it may not be yet that that terrible end will come.

I must not finish with this dreary shadowing of the probable future—it will, perhaps,

give a sunnier touch to my conclusion to tell that Algernon and I have just been deciding that if that mournfullest time comes, if utter ruin and desolation burst over the heads of the devoted family, we will offer a home to the children—and Philippa and Sara shall then be surrounded by that protecting love and care, with which, poor little things, they have never yet been blessed.



CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

YES, confessions still! though I am old more from suffering, self-originated suffering, than from the burden of years, I have lived long enough to view, in the light of confession, many revelations which, in the inexperience of youth, we speak of with boasting lip and exulting glance; and alas, I have lived to feel the real agony of confession. I have learnt the fearful results which may arise from carelessness, and over or rather weak generosity. May my afflictions serve as a warning to those who,

in the unwisdom of their young days, half pet, and wholly indulge their weaknesses!

Not long ago, I was looking over some little treasured memorials of the past: there were letters written to me by Algernon, before our marriage. I could not read them, I knew I should feel humbled to the dust by the high opinion of me, the deep trust, there expressed—there was his own noble likeness shrined in a rich miniature case; I turned away from it and wept. There was the picture of my darling Adrian, my first born, my only one that survived its birth. How beautiful he looked, with his sweet blue eyes, rosy cheeks, sunny hair, and lovingly smiling lips!

Yes, I am old and worn out, my eye is sunken, my hair white as snow, my step faltering; but yet, as I gazed on that bright, innocent face, the agony of spirit with which

I had looked my last on my dead child, came back, fresh and terrible. Why did that endearing smile linger there to mock me, I wildly thought; had not I, his mother, been accused of causing his untimely fate, and was not *that* anguish enough?

Presently milder and holier thoughts prevailed—the grief of the old lasteth not long, or it would destroy the poor, worn-out frame; it lasteth not, because their future is not earthly, and the light of that future quickly disperses the shadows which past events, stern and mournful, cast over the present.

Then I laid my hand on the confessions of my girlhood, and word by word, and line by line, and page by page, I read them through. How childish, in comparison with my after-griefs, seemed the sorrows and little trials of those sunny days, and

how plainly I could trace, from my early weaknesses, my growing faults, my deep misfortunes! and I determined to finish the crude sketch of my life, that the warning might be a warning indeed.

After our marriage, Algernon having relinquished, at my urgent request, his profession (for I could not see why he should worry himself with it), settled down at his place—Merelands, of which I have previously, I believe, made no mention. And an exceedingly pretty place it was—the elegant little mansion, with its light portico and glittering conservatory, with its balconies and balustraded roof, and fine terrace in front, standing in the centre of gorgeous flower-gardens, tasteful grounds, and broad, beautiful meadows.

It had been heavily mortgaged, when it

devolved to Algernon, but, thanks to my kind grandmother's bounty, it was then free, and we had a clear income from the farms adjoining it, which were let to thriving tenants, of a thousand a year; enough, one would have thought, for us two, with our few servants, to have lived in luxury, but there are no limits to the requirements of extravagance.

I had little experience in the management of a house, and, to my shame, I took little pains to gain experience; I was foolishly good-natured to my domestics, and let them do just as they liked, provided the comforts of my husband and my guests were properly attended to, and that, to all appearances, the arrangement of everything did credit to myself, as the wife of Algernon.

As a necessary consequence of my over-indulgence, my servants grew idle—by their

own version of the state of things, their healths became so delicate, they could not stand any extra exertion; but, as they ate and drank, and made merry as before, I think I am justified in asserting that the malady was mental, a want of willingness being their only complaint; and they were perpetually asking me to let them have help, in the shape of those servant spoilers, and order-subverters, charwomen.

After the introduction into the family of the latter, indeed, I never could keep clever, efficient servants, any length of time, they always heard, through some mysterious channel, of places that were "better and easier" than mine. And mysteriously too, I lost small sums of money, small articles of dress, and once or twice, even jewels; but I did not suspect the charwomen or the servants; I had quite as much faith in the

doctrine of "unaccountable losses" as the kitchen could desire.


My friends had now varied their victimizing plans—instead of borrowing my ornaments, they borrowed my time, my servants, my house! confiding in my proverbial good-nature, they would quarter themselves upon me, and advise me, and order the domestics, and manage, and mismanage, till I hardly knew whether I was at home, or not.

Then, all the young ladies of my acquaintance, who had been hitherto balked in their *laudable* desire to get married as soon as possible, to the wealthiest, not the worthiest, man they could find, would be continually telling me, with their most cajoling tones and smiles, that my parties were so delightful, and that there were none they enjoyed half so much, that, in charity, I ought to give them oftener, that, if I knew

one-tenth part of the happiness I bestowed on my guests, they were sure I would, and so on, till I was actually penetrated, and then possessed, by the idea that I should really be doing good, in a most beautiful way, by furnishing amusement for a set of resourceless young ladies, a crowd of summer friends! and for these idle, gossiping, frivolous creatures, Merelands was to be sacrificed, and a far more enviable, nobler possession was to be, how fearfully, endangered! But I must not further anticipate.

I was determined to act up to the notion I had adopted as my own. Parties succeeded parties, the description of entertainment varying from the *thé dansant*, the *soirée musicale*, and the dinner party, to archery meetings, gipsy and boating parties—for a fine river flowed past Merelands. All this, of course, entailed much expense, but

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besides the rich viands and the costly wines, of which an almost constant stream was ever coming to our house, and of which an awful waste went on, besides the succession of splendid dresses, which I deemed it my duty as the wife of Algernon to wear, there was the loss of time with the loss of superintendence over my household which it involved; my engagements with my guests, my frequent absences from home gave a license, indeed, to my servants, of which they availed themselves to keep open house, or at least open kitchen for their friends, and to give parties on their own account, at my expense.

In the meantime my husband did not cease to remonstrate; at first he spoke playfully—I answered as playfully and without heeding the import of his words: then he adopted a more serious tone—still

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I laughed and went on as before, the next time he introduced the subject, his countenance was clouded, his manner was kind, but anxious—

“Esther, do you know what you are doing?” he said; “with your thoughtless and enormous outlay you are very far exceeding our income, I have been already obliged to mortgage, again, a portion of the estate. Consider what must be the consequence if this draining expenditure be not stopped in time; and remember, that if it is not voluntarily stopped, it will be, it *must* be forcibly terminated eventually, and that then the end will be—disgraceful, ignominious!”

I was startled by his tone, and by the reality he presented to my mind, and I exclaimed, earnestly—

“I will do all that you wish me, I will

economize, have fewer parties, fewer dresses, fewer servants—I will set about retrenching directly!”

But, alas! my zeal soon cooled down; I set about it very slowly, very reluctantly, very ineffectively.

After awhile, my darling boy, my dearly-loved Adrian was born. We had been married some years then; and the quietness of life into which I had for some time, of a necessity fallen, and which I was obliged to continue for several weeks longer, might easily have been made a standing rule of life. But my false friends soon came hovering about me, praising the baby and hinting delicately that a little amusement would be just the thing for me; that if I immured myself so closely within the nursery walls, my health and beauty would suffer, while my friends would miss me *so much, so cruelly*.

I had been very happy during this interval of repose, far happier than I had felt during the whirl of dissipation that had preceded it; Algernon and I had been so much together, so much like lovers once again! ah, if I had but chosen my path wisely, it might have been always so—but I listened to the voices of the sirens, fatally listened!

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CHAPTER II.

It was one of those sweet evenings, whose cool breath is so refreshing after the meridian heat of the glowing August day, and in which I used to love a stroll into the busy corn-fields, along the quieter wood-paths, or by the side of the softly-flowing river, in dreamy converse with Nature; now interpreting the hieroglyphics of the changing cloud or the fading skies, now listening to the audible breathings of leaf and wave, of the wild wood-grass or the cultured corn. The broad silver moon was just rising, rose-tinted by a veil of vapour—

and I was wandering in my garden, not to admire the loveliness of the scene, the rich masses of dark foliage, the paling light of the closing flowers, the mysterious beauty of the heavens, where the gorgeous hues of the parting day and the shadows of the coming night, seemed duskily blending; not to watch for the fitful music of the boughs as the scented breeze passed by, or for the wavy sweep of the owl's pale wings, the tiny trumpet-note of the night-beetle, or the coming forth of the shadowy bats, filling the air with silent life—but to hear and answer the frivolous sayings, to drink in the poisonous flattery of the guests that thronged around.

Algernon was not with me, he rarely now mingled with the frequenters of my *fêtes*. For hours he would shut himself up in his library, quitting it indeed only to visit

Adrian in his nursery, or to take a solitary walk or ride. We had become estranged—he was wrapped in his pride of soul, I in my folly! Was I mad that I could see with defiant obduracy how changed he was? the infatuation of extravagance is indeed a mania, and a terrible one, since it may evilly affect the destinies not only of a family, but of generations of families!

But to return to my narration:—quitting one group of flatterers to seek another, I passed down a deserted walk which led by a gate opening upon the meadows: against this gate stood a gentleman, he addressed me as I approached, I recognized his voice, and somewhat startled, attempted to pass rapidly on, but Philip Warwick, for he it was, placed himself immediately in my path!

“ I will not detain you a moment, Mrs.

Lawne, in pity listen to me! I shall not have another opportunity of making my request, for my end is near, and even by this act I accelerate it."

I had thought to turn back, but I could not stir now, a strange feeling of grief came over me, as I noted his laboured breathing, his broken voice—he went on—

"It is for my children, my little girls, I have come to plead, they are worse than motherless—save them from their mother's fate, protect them from that mother! and teach them to be lovers of truth, virtue, integrity, of all that is good and noble, and to become as *unlike their parents as possible!*" the last words he emphasized bitterly.

"Will you do all this, not for the sake of other and better days, I dare not ask that, though if I wronged you then, you have been fearfully avenged, but for the sake of

the kindness of feeling with which you once regarded me. *I* am all but ruined, but Sara and Philippa have each a small fortune, secured to them by a deceased aunt. Do not refuse me, I implore you, (for there is none other I can trust,) and I will die blessing your name!"

I was much touched by this appeal, and I readily promised to do all I could for the poor children, to treat them as daughters.

After expressing his gratitude, Mr. Warwick continued, hesitatingly—"You will think me unpardonably presumptuous, perhaps, but the only return I can make for your generous kindness, is to warn you of an unseen danger; your husband evidently shrinks from paining you by revealing it, but it is perceived by many a bystander, and it is better you should know that in your innocence and hopefulness, beautiful,

fascinating, influential as you are, you are yet treading blindfolded, the path to ruin! Pardon my words, and take warning by my example, dear Mrs. Lawne."

He went immediately; I felt mortified, indignant that he, characterless and moneyless, a ruined and debased man, should take upon himself to advise and warn me, and infer that I was kept in ignorance by my husband of his affairs; though it was the only charitable construction that could have been put upon my conduct.

Continuing my walk in an ill frame of mind, I met my mother, who eagerly addressed me.

"My dear Esther, I have been looking for you; I wish to have some serious conversation with you. Some words, I accidentally overheard just now, have filled me with alarm, I am very much afraid, my

darling, you have been for some time most imprudently extravagant; now tell me—for Algernon tells you all, I should hope—has your expenditure *long* exceeded your income?"

"I fear it does a little now, but I have promised to retrench, and I mean to begin, very soon," I stammered.

"I am sorry to distress you, love, but I really must advise you to begin immediately—think of your boy."

"I do think of him, mamma, I'm always thinking of him, he's such a sweet-tempered darling—have you seen him this evening?" I said.

"Yes, I have been sitting by the side of his cot, and wondering, as I gazed on his sleeping face so beautiful with that cherub smile flitting and returning, how a mother could leave her child, and such a

child, to mingle in the idle gaieties of life! I fear I directed your tastes into this channel of excitement, when I thought your spirits required raising, but I have bitterly regretted it since. Think, if anything were to happen to that child when you were away, Esther?"

"Oh, his nurse is the kindest creature, and takes the greatest care of him, I have perfect confidence in her! you know, mother, I cannot be always sitting by my boy's cot like a professed nurse:" I answered, carelessly.

"Do you *ever*, Esther? Then, as to your nurse, *I* have but very little trust in her carefulness, she is young and heedless. And how is it, my daughter, that you and your husband are so seldom together now? Have you quarrelled, or has the cold shadow of estrangement fallen between you?"

My mother paused for a reply, but I kept my lips closed.

"Oh, Esther!" she went on, "be advised; renounce for ever these wild extravagances, shake off these locust-like friends, return heart and soul to your husband and child, devote yourself to them as a good wife ought! You cannot imagine how much pain, how many sleepless nights you cause your father and myself."

"I am sorry, mamma," I replied, coldly, "that you should allow such fancies to disturb you! Algernon and I have not quarrelled, or is it likely that we ever shall, especially as we both love Adrian dearly—our tastes differ a little, that is all."

"But your tastes used to be similar—identical; which of you has changed, Esther?"

"How can I tell, mother? but pray

leave off lecturing me, for it is time I rejoined my guests."

And with impatience and anger in my heart, I quitted my affectionate, gentle, anxious mother, grieving her inexpressibly by my unfeeling manner. As I was about to join a line of promenaders, Mrs. Lawne, Algernon's aunt, separated herself from them, and drawing my arm within her own, led me down an unoccupied path. I guessed something, connected with our affairs, was coming, and waited in sullen silence; she did not make me wait long.

"I have been talking to Algernon in his study, a long time, but I can get nothing explanatory from him; you, however, used to be candour itself, so I shall catechise you, my dear. Why does he shut himself up so, in that close room? he looks pale and thin, you should see after him. And why do you give so many parties, if he does not

like them; your income is large, to be sure, but even if you *can afford it*—I winced at the word “afford”—“it may not be desirable; so much company must break up family sociability, you’ve no time to be happy together, to be confidential, to attend to your child. You must not be angry with me, for speaking so plainly, for you know Algernon was always as a son to us, and I have suffered, and do suffer such dreadful affliction, through Agatha’s conduct, and on account of my sad widowhood; and you, and Algernon, and your darling boy, are all I have to think about and comfort me now.”

Poor Mrs. Lawne went away sorrowing; she found me more impracticable than her nephew, and more unsympathetic. Her drooping and saddened spirit was further depressed by my frigid indifference.

After the company had departed, I went

to the library: Algernon was in his usual seat, apparently engrossed in a book. I sank down on a *fauteuil*, disposing the skirts of my splendid dress in shining folds around me, and twisting my dark ringlets round my finger, into richer curl. My husband's eye rested on me a moment, and was withdrawn. The look expressed pity, and I thought, disdain, and stung by it I spoke haughtily—"I have seen Mr. Warwick, this evening, and I have consented to take charge of his two little girls."

"Seen Philip Warwick! why, I heard he was dangerously ill—not expected to recover!"

"Nor is he, I believe; however, I saw him at the meadow gate, he made the request, and the affair is settled."

"And you *met him*, Esther? the profligate gamester!"

"No, it was mere accident, as far as I was concerned."

"Well, you were in a hurry to decide—upon your own responsibility, too; it was scarcely decorous, but I'm surprised at little, now; besides, it does not much matter—where the heir's inheritance is beggary, no fresh claimants to a share can impoverish him."

"What do you mean, Algernon?" I exclaimed, feeling alarmed and uncomfortable.

"Only that, as Adrian will be landless and moneyless, these two little ladies will not be able to deprive him of a portion of the pleasant inheritance that ought to be his."

"You know, Algernon," I returned, somewhat subdued, "that I mean, that I have promised to retrench."

"I know, also, that you are the slave of a lamentable weakness, a great fault, a sin! and that, therefore, your promises cannot be trusted!"

"Oh, Algernon, this to me, your wife!" I cried, mournfully. "But you shall find that you have misjudged me, that my word is yet sacred."

With a sudden impulse, he held out his arms, as if to receive me back to his confiding love—then his countenance darkened and saddened, he folded his arms tightly over his chest, and turned away. I could not follow up the advantage my words had gained, I stood like a statue, my eyes fixed upon him. Slowly and proudly he walked to the door, and left me without another glance; and I sat down and wept, but more from resentment, than repentance.

The morning brought tidings of Philip

Warwick's death, he had only just reached home when the summons came. I was shocked, naturally, but I ought neither to have shown or felt grief. The sad voice and sigh with which, through some strange perversity, I spoke of him to my friends, was an insult to my husband; it caused my name to be associated with one that was infamized by common report, it caused people to infer that the mutual coolness of Algernon and myself arose from a former preference of mine for Mr. Warwick. I knew that my husband felt this, and that the stern protest of his soul condemned me strongly, but, just then, I was more inclined to defy, than conciliate.





CHAPTER III.

AFTER the funeral of their father was over, Sara and Philippa were brought to their new home. They were very different in appearance and disposition. Sara was a beautiful little fairy of a thing, with lively, playful manners, which, for a short time, were a little, but a very little, quieted by remembrances of the gloomy occurrence which had made her an orphan.

Philippa, on the contrary, possessed no claims to beauty, and had an almost olden thoughtfulness stamped on her pale, irre-

gular features; her, eyes, however, were fine and expressive, and redeemed her countenance from utter plainness. She was shy and timid as a dove, and would cower into corners and closets at the sound of a harsh voice—self-distrustful, too, and had a shade of melancholy in her character, touching in one so young; while at heart she was affectionate and devoted.

I tried to make no difference in my treatment of my young charges, but I am afraid I did, my preference was so decided for Sara; perhaps, however, with the pure instincts of a child, a most sensitive child, Philippa read my feelings; at all events, while the gay and volatile Sara was almost always by my side, in my dressing-room, in my boudoir, in the carriage, and in the reception-rooms—the pet of all petters!—Philippa rather avoided, than sought me.

She found though, a better and truer friend; and while Sara was learning lessons in vanity and heartlessness of me, she was being instructed by Algernon, in patience and self-control, in earthly and heavenly wisdom. She was his little pupil, too, in scholastic learning, and his little companion in his wanderings, by the river-side, or through the woodlands. If beauty was not her inheritance, talent was: in all she learned, she excelled, though not in first attempts, or by any natural adroitness, or tact. As a beginner, she was diffident, trembling, awkward, but she kept on patiently, perseveringly, resolutely, and gradually and steadily she advanced. If Sara alone was graceful and winning in manner, and outwardly fair, Philippa was eminently lovely and loving in disposition, and intellectually gifted.

Again, in order to show my respect for my own words, I made some puerile attempts at economizing; but I did not set earnestly, systematically to work, and my efforts were abortive. Without a resolute will, and a clear method, it is vain to attempt to reform, or retrench—the irresolute mind is ever most irresolute whenever the promptest decision is required, and the clouded and systemless purpose ever leads to labyrinths of confusion, whose only outlets are disaster or disgrace.

But I have said nothing all this time of my sisters; and first of Lilian, sweet Lilian and her sedate, but happy husband. Lily and I had not seen much of each other since our marriages. Mr. Adolphus had little liking for the gaieties of life, and less inclination that his wife's domestic tastes should be spoiled by them, consequently Lily never

came to Merelands, for her husband's lightest wish was not only a law, but the pleasantest of laws to her. At the same time, I was always a welcome guest at her quiet town house; but, as I met there the quietest of quiet people—people who could dine with satisfaction off the plainest of plain dinners, quaff strong, creamless tea, as if it were nectar, and tell, or listen to, the same story half-a-dozen times, with imperturbable gravity, who could attire themselves with Quaker-like plainness, and never feel abashed though gems were flashing, and satins shining, and feathers waving near—therefore I went but seldom.

Nelly and I were not much more sociable. Nelly had a prodigious family, and scarcely a thought beyond it; it was not unnatural, I suppose, that she should have thought her children, the finest, the cleverest, the

best of children, and that she should have been much engrossed by her maternal and wifely duties; if there was a fault in her being so absorbed by home-cares, it was a fault in the right direction. The distance between our residences, too, was a bar to our intercourse.

Five years had passed, I need scarcely say how unhappily. The pleasures that are perpetually haunted by self-accusation, however disdainfully its spectral presence may be denied, cease even to be pleasures. Glowing excitements may briefly light up their weary, restless, clouded spirits, inebriations of vanity be mistaken for enjoyments, triumphs of pride fill with elation the passing hours; but the Conscience-stricken never may repose on the pillow of happiness, or gaze rejoicingly on the day-star of hope, or dauntlessly rest on the bulwarks of faith—

the souls of the Self-condemned, are as pain-shadowed, and incapable of rest, as the frames of the Death-doomed! Five more years, and I stood reckless, wilfully blind as ever, on the very verge of ruin—wooing down the darkness of misfortune!

Again the August sun was lighting up the earth with its sultry splendours; the days seemed intolerably hot, and long, and weary to me, for I was recovering from a tedious illness, (which had succeeded the birth of a daughter, who had lived but a few hours), and was obliged to keep very quiet. I was not allowed, by my physician to see my gay friends, and Algernon, whom my slightest indisposition would, at one time, have filled with anxiety, now made but formal inquiries respecting my convalescence, but formal visits to my sofa.

Sara, at her own request, had been sent

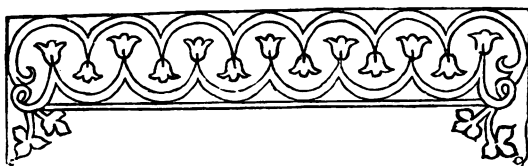
to a fashionable and exclusive boarding-school, more than a year before, and she had not expressed at the termination of the Midsummer holidays, the slightest wish that her stay at home might be lengthened, in order that she might be with me.

But Philippa was scarcely ever away from me; she would read to me, talk to me, or watch silently by my sofa, as I slept; she bore with my humours, adapted herself to my moods, anticipated many a wish, and supplied every visible need. Even in the morbid state of my feelings, in my unnatural distaste for the beautiful quietness of true domestic life, I could not be insensible to her worth, ungrateful for the blessing of her pleasant presence.

And then, Adrian, my darling Adrian, would come to me whenever allowed, and fill the air with gladness, with his dulcet

tones and silvery laughter, finding joy in everything, from the humblest flowers he found in his rambles, to the glorious sunshine; and ever appealing with those sweet, earnest eyes for sympathy to me, his mother—but I cannot, I dare not dwell on this memory, it would agonize me, even now, too terribly!





CHAPTER IV.

ONE evening, I was lying listlessly watching, from my sofa, the broad, full moon emerge from a bank of soft, purple vapour, and wondering, in a dreamy sort of way, why I had not seen Algernon since the morning of the day before, when the door opened with a sudden and jarring sound. Philippa had gone into the gardens to gather me some flowers, some little time before, but I felt sure it was not she, who had entered with such incautiousness and disregard for my nervousness, and concluding

it was my own maid, I exclaimed, with some asperity—

“Jane, I desire that you will not open the door in that way! how you have made my head ache!”

Instead of an apology, in a meek voice from Jane, I heard a firm, haughty step cross the room behind me—then the tall figure of Algernon stood gloomily beside my couch. A dread of coming evil, a foreshadowing of misfortune darkened my spirit, my apathy fled, I rose hurriedly, “Oh! Algernon, is anything the matter?” I cried, tremulously.

“Nothing, but what you must have long ago expected—but what you must be fully prepared to hear. That, for which you have so long toiled, you have gained, you are a fortuneless, penniless lady of fashion, your son is despoiled of his inherit-

ance—Merelands will be the property of a stranger!”

“Merelands! this house—all?” I gasped.

“Yes, all! are you satisfied? have you lavished wealth to your heart’s content—look forth, and around you—at those sweet meadows, those lovely gardens, with their wealth of bloom and scent, with their magnificent trees, throwing such a rich mass of shadow athwart the lawn elsewhere so sweetly silvered by the moonbeams, at this room, with its appliances of luxury and treasures of art! Yes, look at them as you would at a dead friend, one that had been once tenderly loved, but subsequently, cruelly treated and discarded—look with such regret, such memories, such hopelessness!”

There was a cold, stern passion in his words that frightened me, I could not, then

feel fully their import; I sat silent and trembling.

“In a week’s time,” he went on, “we remove from here; I might claim the delay of a few months, but I will not! the estate has been mortgaged to absolutely its utmost value. Under the pretext of desiring to accommodate me, Leverdale even offered me his latter advances, solemnly promising never to take advantage of my position, but it was all done to further certain ends! an influential and wealthy client of his had taken a fancy to Merelands. Yesterday, he made a formal and peremptory demand upon me for the whole debt; of course I could not discharge it, there will be a sale, and this Mr. Brett, the client, a man who has risen from nothing, because he can save as well as gain, will be the purchaser. The value of the furniture will serve, with little

over, to liquidate your debts; I have been round and collected all the bills, and here they are—thank Heaven, I shall owe no man anything! *You* ought to be thankful, Esther, that you have kind parents to go to, for I shall have no longer a home for you; I must begin the world anew, to toil, not for myself, but for my poor, poor boy—”

For the first time his voice failed.

“Oh! Algernon I cannot go!” I cried; “I cannot leave you to struggle alone, to suffer alone, and live myself in luxury! Let me share your privations, do not think me so utterly hardened, I cannot bear that we should part!”

“You forget, Esther, that your companionship would increase the privations you speak of tenfold, that I can no longer supply the wants of a lady so luxuriously nurtured, and possessed of such expensive

tastes. My life must, henceforward, be one of stern and severe toil—and it must be a lonely one—there is now no help for it!”

Like the challenging sound of a hostile gun, to a band desperate from extremity, these words came, calling my soul to the combat! my dormant energies awoke, my nervousness, my illness vanished. I felt that a fearfuller crisis than the loss of property was at hand, that the last remnant of my husband's love hung vibrating in the balance; oh! how precious it, all at once, seemed to me. I curbed the agony that was sweeping over my spirits, I forced myself to *think*; then I seized paper, pen and ink, and wrote to my mother. Before I had finished, Algernon, without inquiry or comment, left the room.

Scarcely was I up the next morning, when my dear, kind, indulgent parents made their

appearance, in sore trouble on my account. In their generous love, they blamed themselves more than me, as having trained me unwisely; they pitied, they consoled me, but I felt to my heart's core, the pain and humiliation they were all the time suffering. My father wanted me to return home with them that day, but my mother's quicker eye detected, at a glance, my secret dread, and understanding at once the real state of things, she felt, as I felt, that if parted now, Algernon and I would probably be parted for ever.

My father next proposed to pay off the mortgages himself; as I knew he could not do this without impoverishing himself, I vehemently opposed it; he then offered to apply to Mr. Adolphus for assistance, but this I knew my husband would never hear of; and it was finally arranged that he

should hire a cottage for us, further down the river, and give us an allowance, until Algernon should find something to do, that would put him in a position to support his family comfortably ; this arrangement being, of course, subject to Algernon's approval.

My father and mother then left, promising to come again the next day ; and I went in search of my husband. I found him in his study, writing, and arranging papers ; he looked up as I entered, and then immediately resumed his labours. With difficulty, for his contemptuous frigidity embarrassed and tortured me, I told him of my father's scheme.

"I am sorry that he has made this offer:" he observed, "if I accept it, it will only prolong our mutual wretchedness. I wish that absolute necessity still constrained our

separation. I feel it will be a *dègrading* position for me, thus to receive, even for a brief period, support from your father, but my boy is old enough to learn something now, and he must not, if I can help it, learn *alone* of his mother, he must not learn to be unprincipled and reckless!"

Oh! why did my affection for him return in all its old intensity, while his for me was so evidently expiring? The anguish, these words occasioned me, was almost intolerable, but I could not, would not plead for myself, plead that he would be more merciful in word and thought. What a wretched week that was—it makes me shudder, even now, to recall it! Algernon showed no more sympathy for me than if I had been an inanimate block; I saw little of him, indeed, but whenever we chanced to be together, he was cold, stern, haughty—his character seemed

totally changed, perhaps, it had long been changing; but I had always taken it for granted that the indifference had been only on my side, and that I could have as much influence over him as I chose to exert. Even a noble offer of aid from Lilian's husband excited only his supercilious resentment.

In vain, those miserable days, I denied myself to my fashionable friends—they would see me, they would pity me, they would be unceasingly probing my heart, that they might if possible discover its wounds. How the noise of their coming wheels jarred on my ears, how the sound of their satisfied voices, tuned to a lugubrious key, tortured my sensitive nerves! They saw and understood everything but the hints I gave them that I wished to be alone. While Algernon comprehending nothing of my feelings, be-

lieved, I know, that I encouraged their visits, in order that I might display my sensibility.

The final day came; my mother was with me when I took leave of my dear, dear home; for the last time we traced all its winding paths, sat beneath its fine trees, and watched the sunset from its beautiful lawn. Memories, mocking memories, came trooping back from the Past where they had slept so long; every flower, every tree, every shady nook and turfen knoll seemed to have whispered stories of departed happiness wherewith to taunt me.

For the last time, we walked through the rooms, those tastefully furnished rooms, stored with luxuries, and filled with rich presents from Algernon, given in the early days of our married life; and each gift told its tale, and conjured up pictures of those

gladsome times, till unable to endure the agony of reproachful recollection, I threw myself on a sofa and burst into hysterical paroxysms of weeping. It was the first time I had shed tears, since I had listened to Algernon's disastrous intelligence; to his cold, contemptuous reproaches; my pent-up feelings had gained power by their repression, and it was long ere I could calm them, notwithstanding my mother's soothing kindness and sympathy. While we had been walking through the grounds and the house, Algernon had remained shut up in his study—once, during my hour of overmastering anguish, he came to inquire if we were ready to depart, but showed no emotion at my distress.

It was a sweet cottage my father had hired for us, with a bay-window at each

end, with a pretty green veranda whose pillars were draped with Virginian creepers and silver-flowered clematis, and with a beautiful miniature garden, sloping down to the bright river whose pleasant tones, as it flowed murmuringly along, could be heard from the open windows. And it was so nicely fitted up, and there were everywhere such touching evidences of my mother's kindness and love, that my heart glowed with gratitude to her, and my father, as I took possession of it.

Wisely enough, dear mamma had determined that I should have but one servant, rightly concluding that my over-excited mind would be tranquillized, and the bitterness of my grief softened, by active employment. I set to work resolutely, in the performance of my household duties, for a new energy was awakened within me; and

Philippa, was a charming little help, so willing, so anxious to oblige, so constantly on the watch to save me from too great exertion.

But, though the pain of self-reproach was lulled to sleep while I worked, a glance from Algernon, or the sound of his voice would bring it back, acuter than ever. Day after day, week after week, month after month his manner never changed towards me, the shadow never moved from his countenance, the chill reserve of his accents was precisely the same. I tried, by every silent method, to win back his esteem, his love—in every matter his tastes, his wishes, as far as I could discover them, were followed. I managed my affairs in an orderly, and thoroughly economical way, I made no bills, paying for everything with ready money, and kept exact accounts of all my

expenses. But I never breathed an allusion to the subject nearest my heart, I could not ask back the affection that was withheld from me, and I never mourned, but in secret.

My Adrian, too—my beautiful boy, would often fill my heart with wild, unappeasable regrets, by his childish prattle. He would talk of Merelands, and ask when we were going back, and whether I would not take him to see his flowers, his tame rabbits, and his chickens, for ten minutes at a time, and nothing I could say would divert him from his subject; and, all the while, Algeron, if present, would seem to be watching me intently, with a sort of emotionless curiosity.

Sara, too, added to my trials, when, at the end of the quarter, she left school. Child as she was, she was very ambitious

and proud, and a sullen discontent appeared settling over her spirit, as she contrasted our present life with those brilliant gaieties of past hours, which to me, in my new frame of mind, seemed so vapid, so hateful.





CHAPTER V.

I HAVE mentioned that our garden sloped down to the river; the river-banks were, however, guarded by a low wall, over which ivy and honeysuckle had been trained to climb. A wicket opened upon a flight of steps, which led to the edge of the water, to the lowest baluster of which a boat was usually moored. This gate was always locked, and Algernon generally kept the key in his own custody, to assure himself that no accident could happen, through Adrian's getting on the steps.

The winter had passed quickly, yet harshingly to me; the cloud still darkened our home, Algernon was still impenetrably frigid, and proudly indifferent, it appeared to me, to all I could do to make amends for the past. My energies had never again slumbered, my *will* never faltered, my resolve never wavered; but there was a burden on my soul almost too heavy to be borne.

The gentle spring had come, bringing with its beautiful flower-gifts, its heavenly breezes, its fair, smiling skies, and fairer promises—joy and hope to many a tried spirit and fevered frame; but weary and hopeless, my thoughts turned away from the present, to gaze not into the more immediate, but the remoter past—not on the time when I was the pale-shining luminary of a crowd of mock-adoring Guebers, but on

the days when I was the guiding-star of one, who esteemed, and loved, and trusted me above all! when a noble heart was my rich inheritance, mine empire!

April had half gone by, when one morning Algernon left home early, on business, saying that he should not return until evening. Before he went, he had gone down to the river, and had stood on the steps in a musing mood, gazing at the flow of the waters for some time; this was no unusual proceeding, and I took little notice of it, at the moment.

Being in the garden, after the lapse of an hour or two, I chanced to examine the gate in passing, and found, to my surprise, that the bolt of the lock had been shot, without the gate being completely closed, consequently the gate was quite unfastened. I instantly got a strong piece of cord, and tied the wicket up as securely as I could.

Scarcely had I re-entered the house, when a poor woman who lived near, and whom I knew well, and liked much, came running over from her cottage, to beg me to go and look at her child, who had been taken suddenly ill, in a singular and alarming manner. I would have excused myself, on the plea of my ignorance of the medicinal art, but the distressed mother begged so hard and pertinaciously, that at last I consented. Sara and Philippa were out walking, so with many charges, but without fear, I left Adrian in the care of the servant, whom I considered a very steady, vigilant sort of person.

When I reached the cottage of my poor neighbour, the child had recovered from its seizure, which I discovered had been caused by teething; and promising to send some simple cooling medicine, after I got home,

I walked slowly back, by a different and less direct route than that which I had followed in going.

In passing through a little coppice, I came suddenly upon a party of my late friends, who, seated on some fallen timber, cushioned with shawls and cloaks, were lunching luxuriously; with much show of friendliness, and a still greater show of pity, for what they termed my "sad misfortunes," they urged me to join them in their merry-making amidst the budding boughs; but politely, and rather proudly, I declined. A feeling of bitterness goaded on my steps, as I left them, and in a few moments I was close by home.

As my eye wandered over the little garden, a sickening sensation of fearful wonder came over me. What meant that group of persons bending over some object

on the lawn? what meant that sound of weeping, why did Maria (my servant), wring her hands so wildly? and why did some one try to stop me, as I rushed forward? I *would* see what they were gazing at, I pushed every one aside, and there, at my feet, lay my beautiful boy—his clothes, his shining hair, all wet with the river-water, his sweet, violet eyes half closed.

“Carry him in, lose not an instant, there may be hope yet!” I exclaimed.

Every way I could think of, was tried to restore animation, but ineffectually; then the doctor arrived, and fresh attempts were made, again and again, till even I lost all hope.

My anguish was indescribable! I kept picturing to myself the piteous struggles of my lost darling in the deep, cold river-water, as he clung, perhaps, to the boat-

rope, his imploring cries to his mother, his speedy exhaustion, the wild, mute terror of his glance as he sunk; the wave of his white garments as he again appeared, one moment, to vanish again—to die—till I felt nearly mad, with the intense agony of my pity and grief. But even my overpowering sorrow was silenced, in dread, before the fierceness of Algernon's, when, in the hush and dimness of the eventide, he returned.

He did me fearful injustice then!—to my account of the gate being left unlocked, and of my having tied it, before I left home, and of the cause of my absence, he answered by a glance of bitter incredulity and contempt—he had heard of my having met my former friends, and believed I had sought them out—*he accused me of the death of our child!*

I would not upbraid him for the cruelty of his conduct, for the wrong he was doing

me; I would not even remonstrate with him, while my dead boy lay there; I stood like a statue, though every word of his entered and tortured my heart like a barbed and venomous arrow. My passiveness only inflamed his passion.....

* * * *

But I cannot reveal the details of a scene so terrible in itself, so unmeet for the sanctity of the death-chamber. I never knew what suffering was until that night, when I watched hour by hour, silent, tearless, motionless, by the bedside of my deceased darling, afraid even to kiss his cold cheeks and white brow; while the husband, who was dearer to me than my life, lay prostrate in the dark agony of his spirit, his groans terrifying me, his reproaches depriving me of all power of determination.

In the morning, my rich black hair was streaked with silver, and my eyes were dulled by a tearless fever. Since then, I have been old, I have worn spectacles, and hidden from sight the luxuriance of my whitened tresses.

There was a doubt, a bewilderment expressed on my husband's countenance, as, when the dawn came, he looked on my changed appearance. I saw him go down to the river, and examine the lock of the wicket; he must have been convinced, *then*, of the truth of my statement, for the key he found in his own pocket.

After this, though he made no allusion to what he had seen, his manner lost its bitterness; he seemed fast sinking into a state of stupor.



CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE our idolized Adrian was buried my husband was in a brain fever. For many days he was in the utmost peril of his life, and, for a fortnight, I never quitted his room for an hour. While the fever was at its height, he was often delirious, and would sometimes upbraid me furiously—sometimes speak to me as he spoke in the early days of our wedded life.

How strangely, how touchingly, yet how mockingly, through the gloom of my misery, came those gentle, loving words,

often melting me with their tenderness, but more unseldom maddening me with their cruel contrast to reality. Even now, as I look back through the softening haze of memory, I shudder, and wonder how I survived the tortures of that period of unutterable woe.

A month had elapsed; Algernon was very much better, he could walk out a little, but a calm and changeless melancholy had settled over his mind, which, I perceived, with exceeding grief, my presence had not the slightest power to remove, or anywise affect. Nothing indeed moved him; and I was agonized by the dread that his over-excited reason was subsiding to a stagnation that would terminate in the darkness of idiocy.

My dear mother, ever watchful to aid, ever kind and considerate, proposed that we should all go to the sea-side together;

Sara and Philippa not excepted. I knew and gratefully appreciated her and my father's motive in accompanying us, they wished us to feel ourselves their guests, and not the helpless recipients of their bounty.

Late in the evening of the day preceding that on which we were to start on our journey, I was sitting in the parlour with Philippa and Sara, all three of us busy completing a new dress of the latter's, which she wished to take with her, when a carriage and four drove rapidly up to the door. That he might be better prepared to endure the fatigue of travelling, I had induced Algernon to retire early to rest. I concluded, at once, that some mistake had been made, that our cottage had been taken for some other residence, but, to my surprise, a lady alighted without hesitation,

addressed a question to the servant at the door, and then passing her, entered the parlour without waiting to be announced.

My surprise changed to dismay, as I recognized Agatha Warwick. She had come, I knew, to claim her daughters, and much did I regret their presence, for I dreaded more her power of tempting them, than I did her capacity of resisting my right as their protector, of setting aside my guardianship.

Agatha looked eagerly at her two young daughters; her gaze grew dissatisfied, as it rested a moment on Philippa, then exulting as it scanned the beautiful lineaments of Sara's countenance. She turned to me—

“We are friends?” she asked, “I owe you much for your generous care of my children. I have come to relieve you of

that care and trouble. I shall not forget my debt to you. My loves," she resumed, turning appealingly to the startled girls—"you will come home with me, you will come and enjoy the splendour and luxury to which you were born, you must no longer be buried alive here, dressing and slaving like menials. Jewels and rich robes shall adorn you, you shall shine at the ball, the *soirée*, the *al fresco* festivals of the brilliant South. Your hearts shall swell to the strains of delicious music, your steps glide through the graceful dance, you shall have beloved companions of your own age—come!"

Philippa turned very pale, and shrunk back, as her mother held out her arms.

"You have been well taught, I see!" said Agatha, glancing angrily at her. "But it is perhaps as well, *you* would be

utterly unnoticed, where Sara would reign a queen!"

How Sara's countenance brightened up at her mother's words, though not with affection, the master-chord of her nature thrilled to the artful touch of her guileful and sinful parent.

"Mrs. Warwick," I interposed, coldly, "I cannot allow you thus to endeavour to lure them away from my protection. The charge I received from your dying husband was a sacred one; I am resolved to continue my guardianship over them."

"We will compromise the matter," she replied, in an insinuating tone, inclining her face, still handsome in the lamplight, towards me; "you shall have Philippa, she will suit you better, doubtless" (she glanced significantly at my silvered braids and spectacled eyes), "besides, amiability and

usefulness seldom go hand in hand with beauty, so you will have the profitable part of the bargain, while I shall have only my beautiful Sara."

"I cannot give up either," I answered, steadily; "I cannot violate a trust so solemn as that reposed in me by your late husband. You well know that you can have no claim to their custody, since you deserted them by your own free will, and, by conduct which it will be well not to bring too prominently before the world, rendered yourself unfit to be their guardian."

Agatha became pale with passion. "Do you think I care for your insult, madam, or for your setting yourself up for a censor of propriety? Have you not squandered your husband's property, sacrificed your only child to your infamous carelessness, and driven poor Algernon half mad? I tell

you I *will* have Sara! withhold her at your peril!"

"She shall never go, if I can help it," I replied, calmly returning her proud gaze.

Breathing defiance and scorn, Agatha left me. I stood perfectly still, and with unchanging features, till the noise of her departing wheels had died away in the distance; then, a reaction came—I sank on a chair, trembling, half fainting. Philippa hung over me lovingly, yet terrified, protesting earnestly, amidst sobs and caresses, that she would never leave me. Sara sat looking on, coldly, silently, sullenly. She evidently regarded me as an obstacle in the dazzling path of her ambition.





CHAPTER VII.

I HAD congratulated myself that we should be far away from our cottage home by the next evening, and that thus, possibly, communication between her mother and Sara might be prevented, and the thoughts of my beautiful charge diverted from the dangerous temptations presented to her, by change of scene and life; but, alas! the next morning Algernon was too unwell to undertake the journey; he had caught a violent cold—the trip was put off for a week.

I had informed Algernon of Agatha's

visit, but he had shown little interest in the matter, and was indisposed to hasten his departure on that account. How tryingly those days seemed to linger!

One beautiful night, when the stars were shining brilliantly, and the crescent moon was sinking low towards the horizon, shining like a crimson bow, through a thin, hazy cloud that skirted the skies, I had dropped asleep after an hour or two of wearying restlessness, and had not lain, it seemed to me, in a state of unconsciousness, for many minutes, when a loud tap at my chamber door roused me.

I found Philippa outside, all trembling and tearful. Sara was gone—her sister, who slept with her, had been awakened by some sound, of which she had no clear remembrance, and had found the night lamp extinguished; speaking to Sara, she had

received no answer. She rose immediately, and drawing up the blinds, discovered, by the pallid light of the stars and the young moon, that Sara's pillow had never been pressed. She then recollected that she had fallen asleep, that night, while Sara had been still lingering beside the toilet-table, playing with her beautiful ringlets, and that once she had been half awakened by the creaking of successively opened drawers. To confirm the fears that darted through her mind, her ear caught at that instant the sound of carriage wheels rolling rapidly away through the night.

I was dreadfully distressed, we had no means of pursuit, and if we had, it would have been of no use to have sought the fugitive, for even if she had been recovered, the flight that had been once attempted would have been attempted again. Sara

had too determined and ambitious a spirit to be discouraged or weaned away from a project; besides, her mother had doubtlessly already, in some degree, poisoned her mind by means of letters, though I could never find out how the requisite intercourse for arranging the elopement was carried on.

“Oh, Philippa!” I exclaimed, with passionate grief, “your mother will beguile you away next! she will teach you to forget, to despise all I have taught you; she will offer you happiness, and lead you into sin; and I shall be left with no one to comfort me, heartbroken by the affliction you will cause me.”

“Fear not, my dear, kind aunt,” (she ever called me by that pleasant name), “I promise, solemnly promise, never to leave you, without your consent; and not for all the

world could give me, would I go to my mother. I pity her, for I know she must be unhappy, I know that she is treading the fearful path of sin. And I pray that the hour of repentance may come—and should it, should she ever be poor, and wretched and penitent, with your permission, I would seek her, and strive to comfort her, but never else. Oh, my poor sister, what will become of her?”

I shuddered at the question, for I was aware that Agatha had grown thoroughly depraved, and that, in the odious spirit of such depravity, she wished to make her daughters as abandoned and vicious as herself.

The intelligence of Sara's flight scarcely roused Algernon from his apathy even for an instant, and he shocked my feelings by remarking—"It is, no doubt, best as

it is, she would never have been contented here."

I never saw either Sara or her mother again. They are both dead now; the former, in the midst of splendours, richer and more royal than she had ever dreamed of, lived to taste the bitterness of the draught for which she had pined—and *then*, ere she had reached the prime of her exquisite beauty, in the waning of her evil triumphs, in the growing knowledge of the misery that was darkening around her, the hand of the Destroyer smote her!

Her mother's fate was even more dreadful. Mrs. Warwick was mixed up in gambling transactions, swindling affairs, quarrels, and iniquities of all kinds. Crimes darkened the horizon of her existence, crimes shadowed the brows of her daily associates, and a crime-stained hand, it is said, shortened

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the life that had been already far too long—not only for her own happiness and reputation, but for her safety; had another day dawned for her, it would have doomed her to a Roman prison.

May the veil of dim obscurity, that hides the details of her destiny, never be lifted for the world, or even for the friends of her youth, her life never be pictured in its horrors! it is too black, in its shadows, to be looked on by the eye of purity, too terrible, in its colouring, to be gazed on without anguish by those who once truly loved her.

And more than all, do I hope and desire that my sweet, gentle Philippa, may live and die in ignorance of these frightful particulars; I pray that her heart may be never more pained than it has been, by the sad outlines of her mother's history.

The visit to the sea-side had but a temporarily beneficial effect upon Algernon's health, which, for years, vacillated between greater and lesser indisposition, but never effectually rallied. And, all these sad years, his mind was in the same apathetic condition. But the perfect restoration of his mental powers came at last, the mist dissolved away from his sight, he could see the past, present, and future in their true aspect; his soul was at peace, and his love returned—the love of our early married life was once more *my own*. Oh, how I prized it *then*! a thousand times more, than in the first flush of happiness, since its long, mournful eclipse.

Yes, we were happier than we had ever been before; we knew each other's hearts, their deep affections, and besetting weakness, we knew that each aspired after excel-

lence, and therefore looked trustingly on the future.

But the future we pictured never came! or might that rich summer-time of restored bliss remain. Black as the swathings of the tempest was the shadow of its departure—a midnight darkness fell on the sunny noon—Death laid his crushing hand on the dial of flowers!

We were sitting together, Algernon and I; we were talking of that more perfect, heavenlier path, we hoped to tread together; we were weaving bright dreams of happiness and holiness; the sun was shining sweetly, the birds were singing, the leaves whispering over us, when a deep sigh fell on my ear, the hand, holding mine, grasped it tightly—

He was gone, he had left me! I could not, would not believe it, I should have died that minute, if I had!

The energy that had supported me through so many trials had deserted me now.

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CHAPTER VIII.

SOME years passed before I recovered from that terrible shock; in the interim my dear father died, leaving me a comfortable little income; and then, at my mother's earnest request, I went to live with her. And the change to the home of my birth did me good, old associations were revived, fresh ones awakened. My deep love for Lilian returned, I went to see her and her husband, and her charming daughters, two out of the three of whom were already married, and lived not far away. Afterwards I paid

a visit, a very pleasant visit, to Ellen and her family. I made, too, some new friends, though they were neither young nor gay, brilliant nor fashionable, but sage, care-worn individuals like myself, gifted with the quietness I once so despised, with the peace of mind of the unworldly.

From the period of my poor husband's decease, Philippa had been most sedulously, devotedly attentive to my wants and wishes, every endeavour seemed directed to ministering to the ease and comfort of myself. She has never changed; as she was then, so she is now, save that she has placed a new idol in her heart's shrine. But I am anticipating a little.

Soon after my mind had regained its tone, I lost my beloved mother, and I very nearly relapsed into my previous melancholy state. How much she loved me!

Her only grief, in dying, was the grief of leaving me. And she bequeathed me every farthing she possessed, for I needed it more than Nelly and Lily, she said.

Ever since, I have lived in the home of my birth; ever since, dear Philippa has been my greatest comfort. She has grown almost handsome, so sweet has become the expression of her countenance; and I know *one* who thinks her *quite handsome*.

And who is this friend of my Philippa's? Why, a young man, who is neither handsome nor rich, but what is better, sensible, good-tempered, high-principled, and blessed with the possession of a sufficiency of earthly comforts.

And very soon Philippa will have all that is mine, for my health is failing fast, and my spirit longing for its reunion with those of Algernon and my darling child.

The deep faith of my day hours, the vivid dreams of my nightly slumbers, bear me to them. I live in the light of a glorious trust! But, in the meanwhile, the while I am writing here, the earth has still its joys for me; the reflected happiness of Philippa's life suns my spirit with its calm, beautiful radiance—the memory of my dear parents' love gives a brightness to the home which was theirs, and warms my chilled vitality.

My life is now like the dying flow of some once impetuous river, on which, as its languid waves subside to a gentle trickle, the sinking sun shines brilliantly.

But I have one painful task yet to perform; I must unroll the blackened and reddened page of Agatha's history, before the eyes of him who seeks to be the husband of her innocent, noble-hearted daughter.

* * * *

I have done it! Beneath the mystic dome of the holy night, while the pure stars bent their searching gaze upon us, and the summer wind whispered, with its warm breath, of the glowing South, the land of the mother and daughter's disgrace and sin, we walked to and fro—the prematurely-old and feeble woman, awaiting her release from the fetters of earth, and the hopeful lover, looking buoyantly forward to many, many years of happiness and usefulness with the sweet bride of his affections!

At first, he seemed stunned by the awfulness of the revelation; but, thank heaven, he could discriminate! he could recognize in Philippa's early decision, with regard to her mother's appeal, in her mournful shrinking from the contaminated splendours that were pictured to her, her abhorrence of vice;

he could see that she was uninfected by the leprosy of sin. And the gentle daughter of my adoption, will be, even more than she could otherwise have been, his prized and devotedly-loved bride!

* * * *

One more week, and then she will be married; and Ellen and Lilian, with their husbands, and sons and daughters, will assemble in the old house, to do honour to the occasion, and it will a happy gathering! And Philippa will be the happiest of the happy—for will she not have found a true and generous protector in Gerard Thorn-dale? and will she not enter upon her new life with the blessings and good wishes of all that know her?

Yes, one more week, and my guardianship will cease, my trust will be rendered up, or rather delegated to another. Oh!

that *two*, instead of one, might thus have been left—that the missing one, the dead, the beautiful Sara, might have been similarly bequeathed to some honoured protection—a pure gift to a pure spirit! But the regret is vain, futile—it must not mar the calm beauty of these latter days! My life's task will soon, very soon be over, my hours fulfilled—I shall, I feel I shall, witness that auspicious day, and then—and then.....

* * * *

THE END.

50, Conduit Street, Hanover Square.

May, 1859.

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